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THE
DRIVING FORCE
GEORGE ACORN



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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



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The Driving Force

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ONE OF THE MULTITUDE

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The Driving Force

By

George Acorn

AUTHOR OF "ONE OF THE MULTITUDE"

Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner



London

John Long, Limited

Norris Street, Haymarket

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First Published in 1915

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The Driving Force

CHAPTER I

MATINS

IT was a delicious morning in May, some twenty years ago, at the hour of seven, when the mounting sun sends vibrant shafts of light through back streets and alleys—through orchards and winding lanes.

From Dumpton Court and Puritan Row, from Abraham Street and Scroggins Lane, children tightly holding bundles in brown paper and mothers in *négligé*, made their way to St. Olave's Schoolrooms.

Mr. Richards was standing at the door talking with the vicar—the Rev. Lionel Pontifex—and greeted each arrival with a cheery word and a smile of recognition.

“Is Mr. Fortune bearing the expenses of all the children?” asked the vicar.

“I think not,” Mr. Richards replied. “So far as I know he has a special interest in four of the children who are going away to-day, and I suppose the others are invited by other country gentlemen.”

“I thought you would know,” added the vicar, “especially as he invited you to nominate one child.”

“Oh, Margaret Angel,—yes, that is so. You see, her father was killed at work only recently, and I

thought it would do her good to get away into the country for a fortnight."

"Quite right. So you mentioned her name to Mr. Fortune?"

"Yes.—Who is to go with them?"

"Oh, Mr. and Mrs. Trent will do that, they are in the schoolroom now; he is speaking to the audience—do you hear him? Trent is rather given to making speeches, it's a fairly harmless complaint,—but he's a very capable man at anything like this."

They moved away from the door and paced the vicarage grounds, looking now and then through the windows of the schoolroom, where Mr. Trent continued to impose his oratory upon the assemblage—now complete. He was just tying his mind into knots with a rambling line of parenthesis, when a tap on the open door called everybody's attention to a short, horsy-looking man with a fat red face in which were set two small twinkling eyes; in one hand he held a long whip and a pair of gloves, with the other he flourished a piece of paper.

Instantly there was a rush for the door. The mothers and their children hustled the horsy-looking man in their haste to get out—greatly to that gentleman's indignation,—and began to swarm round two pleasure brakes in the street outside. He flicked his coat with the tips of his yellow driving gloves and proceeded to address Mr. and Mrs. Trent. "Mornin', sir," he bowed. "Mornin', mam."

"Er—morning," replied Mr. Trent, thrusting one hand under his coat-tails, and with the other holding up for closer inspection the slip of paper. "H'm—is—er—everything ready?"

“Yessir, me and Ginger Stodd—other driver is Ginger—is what I might term ready, aye ready, as the song says ; and when Bill Bring—that’s me—says it’s ready, well, it’s ready, and don’t forget it.” He drew his hand across his lips—a symbolical action signifying the recent refreshment of the inner Bill Bring, and the readiness of the whole man to devote himself to the task before him—cost what it may. He then retired.

“Interesting man, dear,” remarked Mr. Trent.
“Rather a character ? ”

“I think he’s horrid, dear,” said Mrs. Trent. “He hardly seems respectable. And look how strangely dressed—horrid man ! ”

They followed the object of their critical remarks as he rakishly sauntered towards the brakes. Mr. Bring mounted the box, and carefully adjusted the rug over an extremely dilapidated pair of boots and tattered pair of trousers, thus leaving exposed a light dust-coat of Newmarket cut in rather a good state of second-handedness, and a large horseshoe pin in a “Friday” tie.¹ He raised his bright top-hat to the assembled mothers, gracefully bowed to Pilkins, the school caretaker, waved his hand to the vicar and Mr. Richards, then seated himself, and finally drove away.

A burst of song from the youngsters met with his warm approval. “We’re all a-going to Rye House,” they shouted at the top of their voices in accordance with strict precedent. Mr. Bring’s inner man glowed with pride as he remembered that he was first and

¹ Note for the uninitiated. A “Friday” tie is a large adornment that is capable of covering a dirty shirt towards the end of the week.

foremost in that grand procession to the railway station,—his elbows became the symbol of his pride, and positively jerked themselves into the notice of onlookers by being stuck out at his side like the wings of a pugnacious cockerel.

The sounds of "Rye House" having died away, a small voice tried for some time to convert a song wishing "Jolly good luck to the engine driver," from a solo to a chorus, but without success, until Mr. Bring turned round in his seat and led the van (or should we say the brake?) to victory. Again the voices died down, the crunching of "broken" biscuits occupied the roysterers' attention, the brakes rattled and bumped their ways through the City to Waterloo.

Mr. Bring began to yearn for human discourse.

"Don't 'ear you a-singing," he said to a young girl who was sitting next to him.

She turned at once to reply with a bright, clear-eyed responsiveness in striking contrast to the mourning garments she wore.

"No," she said, "I wasn't singing."

"Didn't notice your mourning," apologetically replied Mr. Bring, "or I wouldn't 'a said anythink. Couldn't expect you to sing under the circumstances."

"No," she naively replied. "I was eating oranges."

"Lorst your mother?" Mr. Bring imparted a slight tremor to his voice, hoping thus to imply a tender regard for her loss.

"No, only my father."

"Ah!" Mr. Bring sighed. "That's how all you gals speak of the men. 'It's only father!' Now if it 'ad bin your mother, you'd 'a-spoke different, wouldn't you?"

The girl flashed up in a moment.

"I loved my father," she said. "You know what I meant when I said that, so you needn't pretend you don't, and make a song about it."

Mr. Bring's admiration was kindled at once by this outburst. "Beg your pardon," he said. "I ain't bin so much in serciety lately, and I've forgot my drorin'-room mannaahs,—but I say! what a nice colour your 'air is,—just like a kind of a gold colour, and your complexion——! Why, when I was in serciety the wife of the Lord-knows-who paid a thousand pounds to get a complexion like that."

The girl's eyes opened wide in surprise.

"I believe you're telling a story," she said. "You can't buy complexions even for a thousand pounds;—you can buy face-powder, but that's not real!"

"Hello!" cried Mr. Bring. "What do you know about face-powder, eh?"

"Oh! I go to buy it sometimes round at Tofflin's for my mother."

"Oh!" commented Mr. Bring. "Your mother's a gay young spark then——"

"Only since Father died. Mother said her face was so white and thin to what it used to be, she must give it a touch of colour. And she's not a young spark, she's ever so old. Guess how old she is."

"About fifty?" hazarded Mr. Bring.

"No!—thirty-six next birthday."

The conversation ceased for a few moments; the brakes were caught in a whirlpool of traffic—the horses needed Bring's close attention, but once safely through, he turned to her again.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"My name?" answered the girl. "Why, Margaret Angel."

"Well, that's an uncommon name," he said, "but sootable,—you're an uncommon gal, you see,—it's an uncommon name."

"Father used to say he was descended from Italians whose name was Angelo; but they left out the 'o' at the end after they settled down in England. Sometimes when Father and Mother had a few words, she used to call him a half-bred Dago. Do you know what a Dago is?"

"Oh yes!" responded Bill. "Dago is English for I-taliano—see?"

"I thought it was something like that, but Mother's been sorry for it since Father was killed; but she can't beg his pardon now he's dead, can she?"

"N-no. When you're dead, you're done for," was all Bring could contribute towards a discussion he felt was getting rather beyond his mental powers. "How did your father die?" he added inquisitively.

"He was caught up by a big machine where he used to work. Mother's trying to get compensation for it, and Mr. Richards—the Poor Man's Lawyer—he's getting it up for her. Do you know Mr. Richards?"

"What! Him round in Abraham Street?"

"Yes." She answered hastily, for they had arrived at the station. The children were swarming down from the brakes, and Margaret prepared to follow their example.

While the brake-driver was putting the nose-bags on the horses the unholy thought occurred to him that Widow Angel's acquaintance might be well worth making, especially if she got any compensation

for the accident to her late husband—well worth his while to try, at all events.

“Billy Bring,” he said to himself, “opportunity comes seldom,—an’ it’s come to you. S’pose she gets a couple o’ hundred pounds, and s’pose you marry ’er? S’pose you take a little public-’ouse together somewhere? Ain’t that worth trying for? Ain’t it worth a bit o’ trouble?” Thus he mused, then rapidly gave orders to Ginger Stodd to give an eye to the horses, and followed the children into the station. “Well, good-bye, my dear,” he said unctuously, “good-bye, and Gord bless yer,—don’t forget to bring us back some apples.”

A moment later the train began to move out of the station. Mr. Bring’s eyes followed the vision of golden-haired Margaret, who, leaning through the window frame, waved her hand to him till each became invisible to the other.

CHAPTER II

“ MR. FORTUNE’S LOT ”

THE train sped on, rushing disdainfully through town after town, county after county, until glorious Devon was entered.

The children were bidden to alight at Ponderbridge and to stand quite still while Mr. and Mrs. Trent counted them, presumably to make sure that none had fallen out of the train on the journey, or been mislaid in some other unpleasant manner.

Country people with vehicles of all kinds were waiting outside the station, and these drove away shortly afterwards, taking with them small supplies of juvenile cockneys for the amusement and enlightenment of the natives.

At last only four children were left to be claimed, among them Margaret Angel and, to her great delight, Dick Bonnerdale.

“ Be you Mr. Fortune’s lot ? ” asked a grey-haired old man, who now slowly sauntered toward them.

Mr. Trent stepped over some luggage bundles and eyed the old man up and down before he exclaimed, “ Ah ! Er !—Well, my good man, what is your business ? ”

The old man with his sun-faded clothes and slow, patient speech formed a striking contrast to dapper little Mr. Trent with his jerky articulation and general air of importance.

“My master, the Reverend Loverton, has sent me with the trap to fetch Mr. Fortune’s lot o’ children. Be these they, if you please?”

“Oh! er—let me see—Mr. Fortune’s lot? Oh yes, just so. Are they to stay at the Vicarage?”

“No, they bain’t going to bide at Reverend’s; they be comen long o’ me and wife to my cottage just opp’site.”

“Oh! yes, yes, yes,—well, there they are, my man. See that they have a good time, and—er—send ’em back fatter.”

Again the jog-trot of a vehicle beneath Margaret, but instead of having Bill Bring to talk to her she now sat beside her boy-sweetheart, Richard Bonnerdale—both silently admiring the beautiful scenery, and each other.

When Margaret had been conversing with the brake-driver, this boy had been gazing at her as if there were no other person or object in the world worth half so much attention. He was as devoted to Margaret as ever a dog to master—the light of faithful devotion was in his eyes, a light never to be quenched, despite all this history has to record.

He was thirteen years old then, and tall for his age—a broadly built, rather heavy, boy—with too thoughtful an expression on his face for one so young, and with a mass of dark hair. Honest through and through he was, both by nature and inclination, and possessed of the temper that makes a good lover and a good hater. He read many books and dreamed of personal achievement in the days to come as a knight in shining armour, rewarded in the end from the hand of Margaret—grown into a lady with a white

gown and a golden girdle, as fair as the angels whose name she bore.

He broke the silence with a suddenness that startled her. "Maggie," he asked, "why did you look so sad when I met you this morning—and why didn't your mother come to see you off?"

The girl did not reply for a moment, but sat with downcast eyes plainly troubled by his question.

"Of course, Maggie," added the boy, "if you'd rather not say,—I'd rather not hear."

"I will tell you, Dick," she answered. "My mother didn't so much as get out of bed to bid me good-bye—I have never been much of a trouble to her—and I think she might give me a little love sometimes. That was why I was looking miserable, I expect."

"Poor old Maggie," comforted Dick. "I am another unfortunate, only instead of having a doting mother, I've an antidoting aunt to worry the life out of me. Still, Maggie, we'll win through, whatever they may do to stop us from getting on. Don't worry about your mother; just make up your mind to have a jolly good time now."

When they arrived at the cottage, Dick helped Margaret down first and then the other girl, to whom careless ancestors had bequeathed the name of Jemima Higgs—thus labelling her as a slum product true to pattern, of Puritan Row. She was sallow and snub-nosed in appearance, sharp and generous by nature.

The other boy, William Eston, had been brought up by Dick's aunt, and the boys were generally regarded and spoken of as brothers, because they

lived together. He was a shapely boy with handsome features, marred, perhaps, a little by a certain sullen look about the eyes. Two years younger than Dick, he was accustomed to rely on him for help in getting out of scrapes. He was the kind of boy whose life is a serial story of trouble.

“Now make y’self at home, boys and girls,” said Mrs. Parrott, when they entered the old gardener’s cottage. “Now, Dan’l, just pop over and let the Reverend know the childer have arrived. He might be anxious else.” . . . All in the same breath she continued asking for their names, what they thought of Ponderbridge, did they like oat-cakes, and how much longer did they think the kettle would take to boil for tea?

Jemima and William were quite unable to reply to this. Dick merely nodded sympathetically. But Margaret at once remarked, “My mother always says a watched kettle never boils; she always hides it when it’s on the fire—hangs a towel on the string.”

“Does she now!” Mrs. Parrott appeared to be impressed. “I’ve heard tell as they do strange things up in London, but—well, Dan’l, did you tell the Reverend?”

“Aye, and he says he’ll come and see them in the morning, and they’re to come to see him in the week when Mr. Fortune’s there.”

Mrs. Parrott grouped them all round the table and handed round plates of eatables and cups of tea as fast as they were required, until there came a lull. Then she smoothed her lap and asked, “Is Missis Esther comen over with Reverend in a’ mornen?”

Old Dan's eyes softened perceptibly. "She be comen too, bless her heart."

"Has the clergyman got a little girl?" asked Margaret, while Jenima stopped in the act of biting at an oat-cake to listen. Richard and William went on eating—they had no particular interest in other little girls.

"She baint Reverend's little girl," replied old Dan. "She be some relation or other. Reverend never had but a boy."

"And a pretty boy he were," added Mrs. Parrott, "for all his wild ways."

"Well, Mother," said Dan'l, "we needn't talk about that ever again. I sticks up for Reverend, and you sticks up for Master Richard, and that's how 't'll be till we ends our days, I s'pose. You're not eating well, Mother."

Mrs. Parrott sighed. "Always will say he had a heart o' gold, for all his wild ways."

"Now, Mother, we doant want ta go into that."

"I mind the day he went, rainin' it were, he come in this very room, his face as white as this table-cloth. 'Martha,' he says—he always called me Martha since he was able to speak—I nursed him in my arms. Ah! he were a sweet baby—'Martha,' he says——"

"Now, Mother, don't 'ee go on like this. Mast' Richard's gone away, and Reverend's my master—so . . ."

"He come into this room and said . . ."

"Mother, the childern doant want to hear the troubles of loife,—it'll be dark soon enough for 'em—I'll just show 'em the garden while ye clear up the

tea-things, and then we’ll all sit round the table until we gets aff to bed. Oi’ve nothen more to do; young Tommie’s put the horses in stable, so we shan’t be long away.”

The children and Dan passed into the garden—a half acre of land crammed with vegetables, fruit, and flowers. In the middle of a strawberry bed a cardboard tiger, artfully propped up by pieces of wood, kept guard, possibly frightening the most timid of the birds by its expression of snarling malignity.

“That looks all right,” remarked William to Dick, to which Dan made reply.

“Had a lot o’ trouble to get that,—young Tommie got it for me,—his uncle keeps a shooting-gallery up Beechmere,—tigers and lions and kangaroos and crocodiles all run along the back, and you take a shot,—and if y’hits, ye get another go.”

“I’m going to be a cowboy when I grow up,” said William relevantly.

“Thing like that,” Dan continued, “is worth somethin’ like five shillings,—but where’s the girls?”

The trio looked round, but neither Margaret nor Jemima were to be seen. They had returned to Mrs. Parrott, and were by this time helping her to “wash up.” “Often says to Parrott,” she was remarking, “how I do wish I had a daughter—a son is not so much use to most of us women, but a daughter——”

“My mother says she wishes I was a boy,” volunteered Margaret.

“Yes, I’d sooner be a boy,” added Jemima.

“Would you, though?—What makes your mother

say that?" Good Mrs. Parrott was surprised to hear of any one wishing for a change in Margaret.

"Well, Mother says if I was a boy I should bring home more money when I go out to work."

"That's true."

"I don't know so much," broke in Jemima. "My father don't work and my mother do, so the man don't bring 'ome the money in our 'ouse, do 'ee?"

"No, dear, but—come and look here, there goes Reverend."

"Oldish man, ain't he?" Margaret commented. "I thought he was coming with the little girl,—I thought he would have brought Missie Esther."

Just as she spoke a sweet, fresh voice at the door bade them "Good evening." A slim, dainty girl in a simple muslin frock, with a mass of brown hair, and a wistful face with dark eyes, stood upon the threshold.

"Missie Esther!" Into the old woman's voice had crept a note of timid love that echoed the effect of Esther's voice upon her heart-strings. "Missie Esther, I'm so glad you came to see the young misses and me—is Reverend comin' in t'night?"

"Not to-night, Mrs. Parrott,"—Esther had a singularly sweet voice. Margaret afterwards said that to hear Miss Esther speak was like hearing her own mother sing,—“Mr. Loverton will come and see you to-morrow morning. I could not wait so long, because I wanted to see the girls at once, to welcome them and give them some flowers.”

"Oh-h!" ejaculated Jemima, as Esther slowly revealed a bouquet of roses, "ain't they beauties?"

"The Vicar told me I could cut some of his pet

roses.” Esther turned to Margaret in explanation. “He and Mr. Parrott are so very particular about those roses, nobody may touch them without special permission, so it’s very kind of him to let me bring some of them for you, isn’t it?”

A few inquiries after their comfort, and Esther held out her hand. “Good night, Mrs. Parrott,” she said. “The Vicar wants me home, I really must go. Good night,—what is your name?”

“Jemima Higgs, miss, thank you.”

“Well, good night, Jemima.”

“Good night, miss. You can call me Mimy, if you like.”

Margaret had gone to the door. Against the sky the trees loomed dark, the brighter stars of heaven were twinkling through the blue gauze of dusk.

“Good night,” said Esther to her.

“Good night, miss.”

“What is your name?”

“Margaret, miss—Margaret Angel.”

“Oh! what a pretty name,—good night, Margaret.” She held out her hand, but Margaret looked at the trees beyond.

“Good night, Margaret.”

There was a strange liquid light in Margaret’s eyes when she looked at Esther,—then almost before either of them had quite realised what had happened, they had kissed.

“Good night, Miss Esther.”

CHAPTER III

MR. BRING GOES A-WOOING

THE meanest house in Puritan Row had a lamp over the street door proclaiming in black letters that it was a lodging-house, that the best beds in the district were within, and that the charge was five-pence per night. Casual lodgers turned up occasionally—mostly gentlemen on tour, dingy gentlemen of the genus hobo, changing over from the Northern to the Southern Circuit. But the fortunes of the proprietress, Mrs. Demmy, were erected upon the fidelity of the “regulars,” a baker’s dozen of men all more or less in a chronic state of decay.

Mrs. Demmy had given the beds a shake, had covered the dirty sheets and pillows with dirtier counterpanes, and now stood at the street door with arms folded across her capacious bosom, her bold black eyes roving the narrow thoroughfare in search of “scenes.” A blue apron caught up in her arms revealed a red petticoat and a pair of down-at-heel shoes. She was a handsome woman in a large insolent way, swarthy, with black hair now negligently tousled and disordered, and was addicted to bright colours in her attire. She was like some daughter of the South—her large pendent ear-rings of glittering gold that swung in sympathy with her nods to passers-by giving the final impression of barbaric beauty.

Perridew's Stables were but a few doors away. Mrs. Demmy watched with some interest the tactics of Mr. Bring who was washing a horse in the road—skipping out of danger with surprising agility when the horse reared and plunged.

Against the doorpost of the stable-gate Ginger Stodd was leaning with a straw in his mouth, now and then throwing remarks of a sarcastic nature to his companion.

A week had passed since the departure of the children to the country, and various schemes had been revolving in Mr. Bring's mind with regard to the Widow Angel.

The question of introducing himself had caused him much anxious thought—then arose the question of clothes.

Although he was abundantly self-confident and inclined to carry things with a high hand, he could not overlook the shabby state of his trousers, and those dilapidated boots.

On the box-seat, of course, everything was "Sir Garnet," a driver's rug may cover a multitude of rags—but for courting—for creating a good impression in unofficial life, new garments upon the lower extremities are always necessary.

He got them from a tallyman at a shilling a week, and upon this very evening intended to dazzle the widow with his attire.

Now Ginger Stodd's conversation was of a peculiar kind; he never by any possible chance alluded to anything directly—he prided himself upon his powers of obliquity, using a rhyming substitute for most nouns. Crimea was his cipher for Beer, Salmon and

Trout meant Gout, Apples and Pears, Stairs, and so on.

"I do believe you're in some Bubble, Bill," he was saying anxiously. "Whatsermarrer? Ain't yer got any Bees and 'Oney?"

Mr. Bring remarked sarcastically that his only trouble at the moment was the "gassy" nature of a certain individual he wouldn't name—and as for Bees and 'Oney, well, money wasn't everything.

"No," observed Ginger philosophically. "It ain't, but—it's a lot. Fancy me now, or you, 'avin' a thousand jimmy o' goblins round the Johnny Horner in the Tin Tank, and a-livin' on the interest—with a Bank Book in your sky-rocket, what you can pull out and show people when they comes it on yer,—that ain't so dusty, is it, eh?"

Mr. Bring finished cleaning the horse, and gave her into the care of another man to be put into her stall,—then he turned to Stodd with a gesture of disgust.

"You speak, Ginger," he said disdainfully, "you speak like a bloomin' kid."

"Well," the undaunted Ginger returned, "putting all artichokes on one side, is it any good mentionin' it,—got any spondulicks?"

Bring paused in the act of slinging his coat over his shoulders.

"Ginger," he said impressively, "Beer and Money'll be the ruination of you. You can't borrow nothink from me, and there's no good mentionin' it, becos there's no 'Puritan Arms' for me to-night. I'm engaged—got n'appointment." He gave a hitch to his coat and moved into the street again. "Let me tell you this, Ginger, Beer and Money'll be your downfall if——"

"If I don't get any," shouted Ginger after him, but to no purpose. Bill Bring just spoke a few words to Mrs. Demmy and disappeared into the lodging-house, of which he was a "regular."

Mr. Stodd sniffed the ammoniated atmosphere of Perridew's Stables with keen appreciation for some time, then slowly sauntered in the same direction.

"Well," inquired Mrs. Demmy, as he propped himself up against her doorway, "what's up with you?"

Ginger's right eye slowly closed in a sly wink. "It's not me,—it's Bill."

"Oh, if it ain't one it's the other; you're a precious fine pair. What's the game?"

"'Nuff to make a cat laugh." Ginger's voice was woefully sad. "Bill's in love."

"Go on! No,—you're not goin' to say that."

"Fact! 'E won't stand me a wet o' Crimea,—'e's a-savin' it all for 'er. Bought a penn'orth o' vilets instead,—told me I could smell 'em, as if vilets smells like Crimea! Love and Stickjaw and Toffy-apples and—oh, it's a Tragerdy, that's what it is—a bloomin' Tragerdy, and poor old Bill's the innercent victim of Love."

"Who might the party be?" asked Mrs. Demmy sharply.

Upon this point Mr. Stodd was mysteriously vague. "Mark my cage of birds," he said darkly, "and see if I ain't right."

Bill Bring was one of Mrs. Demmy's most cherished "regulars"—if he should get caught in the matrimonial net, she would not only lose his patronage but it was possible also that visions of domesticity would

lure the others to desert her for the same state of connubial bliss; she pictured herself lonely and forlorn, with nobody to grumble at for coming home late, nobody to exact money from every day,—in other words, nothing to live for at all.

Mrs. Demmy registered a mental vow to put a spoke in his wheel and save him from the abandoned creature (whoever she was) who had matrimonial designs upon him; also, she rather liked Mr. Bring herself.

She closely cross-questioned Ginger as to the identity of the "party," but to no avail. That gentleman's information had been evolved partly from his inner consciousness and partly from observant speculation, so that left matters very much as they were.

Bill Bring at this moment hurried down the passage and squeezed himself past Mrs. Demmy in order to get into the street. Mrs. Demmy gave a gasp of surprise. "Well! I—what's up, Bill? Come into a fortune, or what? Why, you're made up as strong as mustard?"

"Think it's all right, eh?" cheerily inquired Mr. Bring. "I think it's a bit of all right myself. What's your opinion, Ginger?"

He was certainly highly polished,—his face was as shining and red as soap and water could make it,—a cap of a bright checked cloth was upon his head,—a bunch of violets in that coat of Newmarket cut,—his boots as bright as a certain painful newness would allow—and his trousers stiff with self-advertising creases.

He gallantly raised his cap to Mrs. Demmy and wished her "Good evening," to which she responded in a suitable but husky manner.

"Good night, sir," said Ginger Stodd sarcastically. "Mind the step,—and are you comin' back?"

"Good night, my man," retorted Bring loftily. "Would you like to 'ave a smell of my vilets? No?—well, good night, my man."

"Oh, good night, and—you know the soldier's farewell."

"Yes, I do." Mr. Bring bristled up. "And you'll find a thick ear if you're not civil, so what do you think o' that?"

Ginger instantly became apologetic. "Very sorry and all that," he said. "I was only chaffin'. Can't have a bit of sarc now."

So Mr. Bring went on his way while Mrs. Demmy conspired with Stodd to put "a spoke in his wheel."

"So you don't know who the party is?" she asked finally.

"No, missus, I don't; but I think I'll have a quiet little stroll in the same school er correction, and if I should see her—well, I'll let you know."

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Bring walked along Puritan Row and turned into Abraham Street, of which Dumpton Court was a small tributary. He had made some inquiries respecting the Angels, of Pilkins the school caretaker, and had learned that they lived somewhere about the Court without finding out the exact address. He slowed down as he crossed the passage-way leading into the Court—and then paused irresolutely.

"Excuse me," he said to a man who was passing, "name of Angel?—Got a light?"

"Yes, mate, cert'n'y"—the man pulled out a box

of matches and handed them to Bring. "What name did yer 'appen to mention?"

"Name of Angel."

The man peered closely into his face. "What d'ye mean talking abaht angels dahn 'ere, eh?—black ones most likely. Don't you try to take a rise aht o' me, becos you're a-comin' it with the wrong person."

"Oh?" exclaimed Bill. "So you're the wrong person to mention Angels to, are you! You're a fine un, call yourself a Christian?"

"Who calls hisself a Christian?"

"Well, ain't yer?"

"Corse I am; who said I wasn't?"

"Well, there you are! making all this fuss about nothink. I asked you for the name of Angel, and you lead orf like that. There wasn't no occasion for the said leadin' orf; if you don't know the name, you can't tell me."

"Hall right," protested the man. "Don't chew the rag all night; you're worse than my old woman. I'm off. S'long"—and he departed on his way.

Bring turned into the Court and found a group of children playing "hop scotch."

"Do you know the name of Angel, sonny?" he said to a boy wheedlingly.

"Do I not?" replied the boy. "Not 'arf, don't you?"

"Do you think you could spend a penny, sonny?"

"Like to try, guv'nor."

"Well,"—Mr. Bring endeavoured to be a little mysterious in his manner,—“where do the Angels live?"

The boy's answer certainly sounded like "Up in heaven," but this version was indignantly denied when Bring objected to the answer. "Up in Evans's, I said," insisted the boy. "House down the end there, number fourteen. Evans's lives at the bottom, and Vetrys in the middle, and Angels up the top. Knock three times for Angels."

Mr. Bring required a guarantee of good faith before parting with the penny.

"Gawd's truth?" he queries.

"Gawd's truth, guv'nor," was the reply. "See that wet, see that dry? Cut my froat if I tells a lie."

Bring was satisfied with this and gave him the penny. "What are you going to do with it now I've give it to you?"

"Goin' to spend it on riotous livin'," answered the boy, who then thrust both his hands into his trousers pockets and proceeded to dance a jig. Mr. Bring made his way to number fourteen and knocked three times.

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Mrs. Angel at the age of thirty-six was conscious of personal attractions and took steps from time to time to refresh those charms by artificial means, after nature had ceased to refresh them for her. She was rather too painstaking in this respect and overdid it.

Her hair, for instance, was too golden to be quite natural—for her eyebrows were quite brown,—the flush upon her cheeks too steadfast and true to be truthful, but apart from such little vanities, she

certainly was of comely appearance. Her clearly defined figure looked well in the black garments she wore, and she knew it.

The chief occupation of her life was the preservation of her good looks. It was her religion and, in a way, her profession, for in her earlier days Mrs. Angel had been a barmaid. To her there was no happiness at all comparable to serving behind a saloon bar listening to and joining in the idle, senseless chatter of "young men about Town."

To Margaret she had been a good mother in the sense that she was not a bad one,—a woman who meant well, but was unfitted by temperament and upbringing to do well, when such a course meant much trouble.

She had always taken the line of least resistance, which every one knows is not a straight line. In the life-story of Jane Angel were chapters of light frivolity and episodes of deep gloom,—life tragedies they would have been to a more serious nature, but to her they had simply been washed away by the moment's tears.

Not an ideal mother to train up a young girl in any station of life,—a positive danger, now, to such a girl as Margaret, in such a place as Dumpton Court.

At twilight one's memory has a trick of stealing back into bygone days—casting the glamour of romance over things the mind has treasured, but forgotten; the chief value of past experience is the amount of emotions one may distil from them when the memory makes its way back in lonely hours probing and searching like a bee for honey.

Jane Angel's memory was flitting over her bright patches of life as she sat sewing in the fading light.

In a pleasant, rather pretentious voice she sang half consciously an up-to-date song of shallow pathos and indifferent harmony. Then it was that Bring knocked upon the door below, putting an end to sewing and singing, packing away the crumpled rose-leaves of the past—as the hollow sound reverberated through the crazy house.

She opened her window and called "Who's there?" to the man below.

Mr. Bring felt uncomfortable.

"Only me," he shouted. "Can yer come down a minute? I want to see yer, only a minute."

She closed the window and came slowly down the stairs.

The street door was always open, so they saw each other before actually meeting.

Mr. Bring's admiration was quite open and unfeigned. Perhaps for the first time in his life he felt doubtful of himself—felt he was unworthy of such a lovely creature.

"What do you want with me?" began the widow.

"Your little gal," he said rather heavily. "My! ain't she like you?—beautiful little gal."

"Well?" encouraged the widow.

"She's gone away to the country,—ain't she?"

"Yes."

"Well, I drove her to the station, let me see, Waterloo, 9.45 train it were, wasn't it?"

"Something like that."

"Beautiful little gal—she er—told me 'er pore father was dead, and I thought—er—won't be

offended, will yer?—I thought yer wouldn't mind sending these 'ere six penny stamps to 'er,—mentionin' my name, and a-sendin' 'er my love, and say I hopes she's 'aving a nice time,—would yer mind?"

"No, I don't mind," said Mrs. Angel. "Of course I don't mind; it's very kind of you, I'm sure. I was thinking of writing to her to-night, and I'll put 'em along of my own that I'm sending her."

"You're sure now?" insisted Mr. Bring. "'Cos I wouldn't give yer no trouble for the whole wide world."

"Oh, that's all right." She took the stamps from his hand. "I'm sure it's very kind of you to think of my little girl."

"Ain't she like you? I was licked when I saw you come downstairs,—beautiful little girl! I don't take to kiddies as a rule, but I did take to 'er, anybody could tell she was 'er mother's daughter,—so superior."

"Yes, people say she's like me," agreed the widow. "I'll send 'em to her and tell her what you say,—it's very kind of you I'm sure." She made a slight movement, indicating that the interview was now at an end.

Mr. Bring took the hint, he was anxious not to spoil whatever good impression he had created.

"Thanks very much, if yer would be so kind,—without it bein' a noosance."

He prepared to go, and then fired his last shot,—an astute one. "Would yer mind if I called again ter 'ear 'ow she's a-goin' on?" he asked plaintively. "Would yer mind?"

“ Oh no. Can if you like,” replied the widow lightly. “ If I’m not at home I can leave word. What name shall I send to Maggie ? ”

He bowed. “ Mr. William Bring, please. Good evenin’.”

Ginger Stodd from a hiding-place in a neighbouring doorway saw him pass with a look of triumph on his face and heard him say, “ Dirt cheap for sevenpence. Billy, me boy, you’ve broke the ice.”

CHAPTER IV

STRAWS IN THE WIND

THE bunch of roses brought over by Esther was proudly exhibited by Mrs. Parrott in a bowl on her dresser. Now and then she would pause in her housework to smell their sweet fragrance, and note how soon the bud of yesterday becomes the blown flower of to-day.

Parrott always came down first of a morning, and generally had a look round the place before breakfast, so he was the first to be annoyed by a wanton act of vandalism that had been done in the night. The roses had been taken out of the bowl, and their scattered petals strewn about the floor; the bowl itself was left on the table, while the water had been poured into a jug containing milk.

It is to be feared that Mr. Parrott swore softly to himself as he cleared up the kitchen before telling his wife. He had expected some little outburst from the children, but such idle mischief as this made him very angry. So he snorted as he swept the floor in a manner that boded ill for the culprit. Beneath a chair he found a boy's cap, which he decided must belong to the nocturnal prowler.

Mrs. Parrott was sorely grieved to hear of the mischief, but, at her husband's request, preserved as grim and silent a composure at breakfast as he himself.

The children were just rising from the table when Mr. Parrott produced the cap and said slowly :

“Has either o’ you boys lost this yere cap ? ”

Will Eston shrugged his shoulders and said at once “It ain’t mine,” while Dick Bonnerdale looked carefully at it and exclaimed, “Why, it’s mine ! Wherever did you find it, Mr. Parrott ? ”

“Where you left it, I expect, my lad. Were those roses in your way when you came down to this kitchen in the night ? ”

“In my way ?—when I came down in the night ? ” repeated Dick. “Why ! What do you mean ? ”

Parrott told him what he meant rather forcibly, but the only answer, apart from a keen, searching look at Will Eston, was :

“Well, Mr. Parrott, I can only say I don’t know anything about it. It’s as much a mystery to me as it is to you. I should despise myself for doing a sippy thing like that.”

They left the matter at that, although Mr. Parrott intimated pretty strongly that if he caught Dick Bonnerdale up to any more monkey tricks, he would ask the Vicar to send him back home again.

Dick asked Will Eston later in the day if he knew anything about the affair, but the only reply was a look of injured innocence. Dick protested vehemently to Mrs. Parrott that he had had no part in the outrage, and that good lady believed in him.

At the end of the first week of their holiday the gardener’s wife thought to wash the children’s underclothes, so she asked for their soiled garments. Margaret, Jemima, and Will Eston readily complied with this request, but, for some unaccountable reason, Dick

Bonnerdale excused himself, in spite of Mrs. Parrott's urgent representations.

"Now, look y'here, young man," she said at length, "Oim goen to have your shirt and socks to wash, so doan't play with me."

"I am sorry you think I am doing that," answered Dick gravely; "but I must give you 'no' for an answer."

"You're very trying, young man," opined Mrs. Parrott, "very trying."

"My aunt says," replied Dick, "that I've got a streak of cussedness inside me, but I don't believe it."

"She's a good judge, I expect," retorted the woman.

"I don't know that she is," he replied. "I'm sorry you say that, because I must now disclose a family secret—I've only got one shirt—and I'm wearing it."

"Lawks!" The good woman raised her hands in horror. "But you and the other boy—Willie—live together, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, he says he has three shirts with him."

"Oh, I dare say," replied Dick, with a trace of bitterness in his voice. "You see, he is the lamb of the family, and I am supposed to be the black sheep. Everybody knows 'black sheep' don't need proper food or clothes—at least Aunt seems to go upon that idea."

"Poor boy! And I suppose he is well looked after while you do the best you can?"

"Yes, and they—my aunt and uncle—want me to do the worst. I really believe they want me to be-

come a rogue—want to drive me to it—but I won't be driven—I'll be a good man, in spite of everything. It's my ambition, Mrs. Parrott."

"Poor boy! Poor boy! Now let me look at your boots—oh dear, oh dear—worn-out, cardboard soles. And I know Willie has good boots. I won't let this go on while you're here, sonny,—for the sake of the other Dick—Reverend's son—a bonny boy he were! I'll tell 'ee what—I'll take one from Willie for you to wear. No, I won't—I'll buy you some things—but don't tell Parrott—he's just ever such a little bit close where money is concerned. We've all got our failin's, my boy—and he's a good man to me."

She did not dare to tell her husband, but soon had Dick clad in sweet, clean under-clothes.

Mrs. Parrott finished her washing, and some of the things were left all night on the line in the garden, to blow about in the fresh, sweet air.

Four days had gone by since the nocturnal mystery had angered Mr. Parrott—his resentment was fast wearing away when it received a powerful stimulant.

He went into the garden on the morning following washing day, and was astounded by what he saw.

The washing was lying on the wet ground, the line had been cut down from its hooks and was now tightly bound round the neck of the tiger, which was cracked and twisted so as to be useless for evermore. On the ground he found a bagging hook that had been taken from his tool-shed, and, to his horror, found a large patch of ground that had been set with some particularly fine young vegetables, churned and trampled up like a football field on a wet Saturday.

"Dang my buttons," said Parrott, scratching his

head in perplexity, "if this doan't beat all; it's that boy again, I'll swear."

He told his wife that he would complain to the Vicar, and catechised Dick Bonnerdale with a sternness that left no shadow of doubt as to whom he regarded as the guilty one.

After he had gone over to the Vicarage the boys went upstairs to get their caps and coats, when Dick noticed masses of clotted earth on the other's boots, and on his arm a tiny speck of blood.

"Have you been cutting yourself, Will?"

Will Eston's face reddened as he looked guiltily at his arm, then hurriedly turned down his shirt sleeve, and ran down the stairs.

"Will," called out Dick, "are you going to brush your boots?"

"Mind your own business," was the answer. "You're a nosey Parker."

Just then Parrott came in again. "Here, you boys," he called out. "I want to speak to you."

They went into the kitchen, where the old man gave them a lecture against taking liberties and causing annoyance to people who tried to be kind to them.

"What's up now, Mr. Parrott?" asked Will Eston innocently. "I wouldn't do those wicked things."

Dick looked at him with steady contempt.

"There's no more to be said naow," said Parrott. "I can pretty well guess who's doen these things, and they'll know all about it very soon."

Dick and Will went out of the cottage, ostensibly for a walk. They proceeded in silence along the road, then turned through a lane and crossed a stile into a field,

"Where are you going?" asked Will at length.

"To the pond over there."

There was a grim tone in Dick's answer that made Will feel a little timorous. "Are we going to chase the cows?" he asked.

Dick seized hold of Will firmly by the neck, and said: "No! I'm going to give you a ducking, because you're a mean little sneak and a cad."

Instantly Will set up a plaintive howling that carried a goodly distance,—Parrott heard it, and started to the rescue.

"Will you confess to Mr. Parrott that you done those tricks?" demanded Dick.

"I never done 'em."

Dick pulled him toward the pond, Will howling all the more.

"I never meant no harm," he cried, "you brute!" He kicked, and tried to bite Dick, in an unavailing attempt to check their progress to the pond.

He managed to throw his arms around the stump of a tree near the water's edge, and defied all Dick's efforts to shift him. Neither of them noticed Parrott coming towards them, but struggled and fought for mastery.

"Little varmint!" cried Dan as he neared them. "Leave him alone! . . . Up to Reverend to-day wi' you."

He rushed up to the boys and clouted Dick rather heavily—he was convinced that Dick had been the guilty one all through.

The blow aroused all that was bad in the boy's nature. His pride had been wounded—his belief that truth was always triumphant had received a

severe shock. Towards Will Eston he knew his feelings would never be different, or the same as before. Whatever they might do together in the future—at the back of his mind would be the remembrance of his duplicity.

How passionately the young feel things! Ten years later, Dick experiencing like deceits, simply said, "It is sad, but it is the way of the world," and forgave the transgressor; at thirteen he connected William Eston with villainy of the deepest tint, and ever after thought of him as an archetype of evil.

Margaret sympathised with him, for she knew Eston of old. She was so tender and cheering that he was almost glad the event had happened to have brought forth her solaces.

The letter from her mother enclosing Bring's stamps arrived that morning, and when later that day Parrott said he was about to drive into Beechmere, she begged to go with him, to buy a little present as some consolation for her sweetheart.

She brought back an enamelled charm for a watch-chain against the time he should possess such a thing; it was modelled to represent a Dutch girl dancing.

"I love dancing," explained Margaret, "so I liked that charm best of all,—you like dancing too, don't you, Dick?"

"Yes, Maggie," he replied; "and when I go out to work next month, I'll buy a watch and chain, and I'll never, never part with this all my life."

"Oh! when we're married," said Margaret, "I'll buy you ever such a better one, but that will do for the present—and now mind you don't lose it."

CHAPTER V

MR. FORTUNE EXPLAINS

THE pathway leading to the Vicarage door was fringed with flowers ; all Parrott's art had been expended upon an early display,—the countless fires of spring burned gloriously under his practised hands, bringing a vision of joy and a treasury of colours.

Behind the flowers, rhododendrons caught up the torches of beauty, and seemed to have set the overhanging laburnum trees ablaze with golden bloom.

Life was always peaceful in Ponderbridge. At the Vicarage no sound disturbed the sense of quiet—the orchestra of nature lulled disturbing cares and smoothed out the furrowed lines from anxious brows. Thus thought Augustine Fortune as he stood at the gate before entering. The hum of bees, the quivering of young aspen leaves, the steady whirl of Parrott's mower over the lawn behind the house, were all so much in keeping with the spirit of the place that they contributed toward the feeling of rest.

He walked slowly up to the door and rang the bell—it was answered by an elderly servant.

"Good morning, Williams,—Mr. Loverton is expecting me, I think ?"

"Yes, sir," she replied. "Will you please go straight to his study ?"

He crossed the hall and knocked at the study door.

There was no response. He knocked again, and then entered an apartment full of that precious atmosphere of cosy shabbiness which comes of long and intimate use.

The Reverend Arnold Loverton was seated at the table writing ; near him, in an arm-chair, sat Esther, her head resting against the cheek of the chair, looking through the open casement at old Dan as he mowed the lawn.

Between the Vicar and Esther existed a perfect affection. He loved to have her with him at all times—to look up suddenly from the manuscript of a sermon and catch her eyes, pensive and dimly sad, fixed upon him with such a look of trust and devotion as at one time he never thought to see from any one again. A family cataclysm had led to his adoption of Esther at Augustine Fortune's earnest request. Where she came from or who she was, the Vicar neither knew nor cared. Just as an earthquake may rend a smiling landscape and leave nothing but ruins, so fatherly pride may be torn out of a man's heart by his son's disgrace, leaving it seared and aching.

For a time he had refused to hear a word of his son's goings-on in London. They were nothing very serious from the view-point of a man of the world, but in Devon youthful folly assumes great proportions. The Vicar's flock spoke in whispers about it at first, then, when it was laden with the breath of scandal, the poisonous news possessed the father's soul, and when later the newspaper reported his son's arrest as suspected of implication in some daring case of forgery, under the leadership of a

man named Pomeroy, he tore him from his life as a traitor to a gentle mother and a devoted father—an unworthy bearer of a fair name.

Richard Loverton was tried and discharged, there was no evidence to connect him with the crime ; but the blow had killed his mother, and had bowed the head of his father in wrathful shame.

The judge had lectured young Loverton (he was not much more than twenty at the time) and his associate—one Cuthbertson—upon the folly of making loose acquaintances. He bade them be wisely shy of would-be boon companions in the future.

Young Loverton had journeyed back to Ponderbridge shame-faced and contrite ; he would go to his father as a prodigal son, and ask forgiveness. But there was none to be had—his father refused even to see him. He had sown the wind and reaped a whirlwind.

Grief and justice are rarely seen together. So his father's agony of double sorrow drove the son from home, when justice would have taken him in and clothed him and fed him with the fatted calf.

The advent of Esther twelve years before this history begins had been a godsend. Into the ruined hopes of the Vicar's life she had found her way, and had closed the wound (though the scar was always there) with the magic strength of baby hands.

And now Esther was fifteen.

Mr. Fortune entered the room and closed the door behind him without in the least disturbing these two, and surveyed them for a moment with a look of inquiry.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I knocked, but couldn't——"

"Quite unnecessary to apologise," said the Vicar, who rose and warmly greeted his guest. "I'm so glad to see you. Have you seen my little guests,— 'Children of Fortune,' as I call them?"

"Yes, I called in at Parrott's cottage on my way here. A few days seem to have made them very brown."

Esther rose to leave the room. "I think the children will be coming over to see me soon, uncle,—I'll leave you with Mr. Fortune, and go to meet them."

She tip-toed herself out at the door, leaving behind the fragrance of a human flower and the memory of that happy wistful smile.

"You see how much I owe you," remarked the Vicar, gratefully, to Fortune.

"Yes," replied the other in a doubtful tone. "She is much to you, I do not doubt. I wish to speak about her and—other matters."

"Very well, then," said the Vicar, leaning back in his chair and joining his finger-tips. "Fire away."

"First, then," began Fortune, "I should like to know if the behaviour of these children has been satisfactory?"

"Well," replied the Vicar, "the girls have been very quiet, but one of the boys has been rousing the ire of Parrott,—he behaved in a rather lawless way, I understand, cutting down a washing line and damaging a cardboard tiger that my gardener was rather proud of; and they say he made quite a vicious attack upon the other boy, who was innocent of the whole thing. Of course, boys will be boys,—

or rather savages,—ready to strike a blow without a moment's thought." He smiled as he remembered his own school-days when Fortune and he had fallen out with each other.

"Is that so?" said Fortune. "I am very sorry. Which boy was it?"

"The elder,—Richard Bonnerdale,—rather an intelligent-looking fellow. Oh, I dare say it was nothing but an ebullition of surplus energy."

"I can't agree with you, Vicar. The cause of the outburst lies deeper than that,—it is not a mere boyish outburst,—it is a matter of type."

The Vicar was thoughtfully silent for a moment. "In what way?" he then asked. "Surely these boys are of the same type, they come from the same district, live under the same sort of conditions, I suppose? I hardly see how it can be a matter of type."

Mr. Fortune looked round the room before replying. "Do you remember my enthusiasm some years back for going about the slums,—my slums in particular?"

"You mean the Abraham Street area?"

"Yes! You know I am the ground landlord of several streets in that neighbourhood,—Puritan Row, Abraham Street, Dumpton Court, and others. I have also the living of St. Olave's in my gift. You see altogether I have a great interest in that part of London,—I call them my slums."

"Yes."

"That enthusiasm led me into all sorts of places and adventures. I suppose there is hardly another man of our class who has seen so much of low life as I have."

The Vicar nodded. He had heard some of Fortune's slum adventures before.

"Among my most important happenings," Fortune continued, "I count three separate times when babies were thrown into my hands to be looked after 'for life.'"

"Shows a perfect trust in you, I should say," commented Mr. Loverton, "but rather awkward for a bachelor."

"Very, and this is where Esther comes in,—she was the first of these babies."

"Really? Tell me all about it."

"I will, in due course,—the other two children were boys. One was the child of a notorious criminal—a clever, daring man; he was shot whilst trying to escape from Portland. The mother of the child never knew her husband was a criminal until he was arrested. The details of the trial and the nature of his death unhinged her mind,—she was taken to an asylum, where she, too, died shortly after, and I had the child looked after by a local woman—his aunt, who did that sort of thing—for five shillings a week. The boy's name was Richard Bonnerdale. I found out afterwards that the woman who took him was the dead mother's sister."

The Vicar was visibly affected—he changed his seat, and then nodded to Fortune to resume.

"The other boy was abandoned. He was brought when a baby to the woman who adopted Bonnerdale, by a lady who was evidently a go-between for somebody else. The sum of twenty pounds was paid,—a year's money in advance, you see; bad arrangement that, eh, Loverton?—opens the door to all kinds of

cruelty and neglect. But to resume—at the end of the year no more money came along, and the address that had been given was found to be false. So as it was impossible to trace the child's parents, and the woman couldn't afford to keep the child for nothing, she decided to take it to the workhouse. However, I heard of the matter, and went to see the woman, and she told me that the child was evidently of good family—had very good clothing and one or two superior little ornaments, which went to prove the parents of quite a different class to Bonnerdale, so I paid five shillings a week for him too. He is the other boy you know,—William Eston."

"I had no idea your philanthropy took the form of the wholesale adoption of children."

"Stop!" enjoined Augustine Fortune. "You're quite mistaken when you ascribe these actions of mine to pure philanthropy. Of course I don't like to see suffering, and I would prevent what I could, but my motive in looking after these children was purely personal,—I have a theory."

He flung his head back as he spoke,—he had a theory,—Arnold Loverton saw in his face what he had never before noticed—the look of a fanatic,—the expression of the man who has allowed one idea to dominate his mind.

"Does your theory link up the boys' lives with Esther?" he asked rather sadly.

"I will tell you about Esther, and then I will explain my theory," replied Fortune. "Shall I begin?"

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT THEORY

“You have reason, old friend,” began Fortune, “to remember the Christmas of fourteen years ago.”

Remember the Christmas of fourteen years ago! Arnold Loverton knew that he could never forget it. His son had returned on the Christmas Eve seeking a forgiveness that was not forthcoming. From an upper window he had seen Richard walk away from the house with a firm step—the step of a man who had cast out of his life the parent that had cast him out.

“I shall never forget it,” the Vicar replied simply.

“It was upon that Christmas Eve I happened to find Esther. While you were shutting yourself away from your friends, I was exploring a district of London known as Haggerston—a very poor district, but rather better than Abraham Street. I walked through a busy market-place where people were chaffering and shopping. It was rather foggy, and when I had passed through the blaze of lights, the way was very dark indeed. I had to cross a bridge—I believe it rejoices in the name of the ‘Cat and Mutton’ Bridge—and I just happened to stop and glance over at the lock which was faintly visible. The canal waters looked so dark and mysterious that I remained for a few minutes. I was just about to come away when I noticed a woman huddled up in a corner at the side of the tow-path. I could not see

her clearly, but something about her put me on the alert. I went to the right of the bridge and found a low wooden fence between me and the towing-path. I easily got over it and continued to watch the woman.

"She was crying. I could hear her sobs, and every now and then I thought I heard also the cry of a young child, but it was so dark that I could hardly see more than a dim outline of anything. I had been standing there some time when suddenly the woman raised her voice to a fierce muttering—I could only make out the word 'neglected, neglected,' and she made a rush to the water's edge with the intention, I thought, of drowning herself.

"I sprang forward and pulled her back only just in time, and disarranged her cloak as I did so. I saw that she had a child in her arms. 'What in the world are you thinking of?' I said to her.

" 'I can't think,' she sobbed. 'My mind is going round and round—I hardly know what I am doing. I only know I want to get out of it all. My husband left me twelve months ago and I've been unable to get work because of the baby. Whatever am I to do?'

" 'Why did your husband leave you? Would it be possible for me to find him for you?' I asked.

"She did not answer for a moment or two; she seemed to be considering whether she should tell me her story or not. Then she burst out again, 'I was neglected by the man I trusted—fool that I was! I married him and he kept me in apartments. He came just now and then to see me,—why did he do that? I was a fool! Then he stopped away altogether.'

“So she went on until I had heard enough to be convinced that she would free herself of the child in some way or other. She seemed to have little or no affection for the poor thing, and it interfered with her livelihood.

“To make a long story short, I offered to be responsible for the child. She readily consented, and asked me to hold the baby for a minute.

“Then she wanted my name. I told her Fortune. ‘To me,’ she said, ‘you are good Fortune.’ Then she turned and ran away along the path. She had told me nothing about herself, her name, or where she came from. I ran after her, up the slope that led over the lock and farther along the towing-path; but I was hampered by the child in my arms. She gained ground away from me, and soon disappeared from my view.”

The Vicar was greatly interested in this recital, and had broken in from time to time with little ejaculations of surprise. Life at Ponderbridge was on such a small scale that to him the defection of his son, as he considered it to be, had assumed the proportions of grand tragedy.

To hear, as he was hearing now, that other dramas had been playing out their acts, while he had been withdrawing himself from the world, selfishly hugging his sorrows, struck an altogether new chord in his nature. With a larger soul he realised from that moment that however heavy one’s own heart may be, there are others,—and that it was his particular call to ease those others of their burdens, to think more of their sorrows than of his own.

This clearer vision of his life’s work did not become

part of his being all at once. But from that moment it gradually filtered through and quickened a more spiritual conception of his profession into active service.

He broke in again as Fortune paused for a moment. "Was that child Esther?" he asked.

"Yes," admitted Fortune, "the child is the girl we now call Esther; but I must explain why I brought her to you. Broadly speaking, my theory is, that Like produces Like, physically, morally, mentally, and spiritually,—that the child of a burglar will be a burglar if he gets a chance,—that the child of good family will be true to his blood, whatever may happen to him.—Do you agree?"

"It is not consistent with the Christian Faith to agree to that," replied Loverton.

"Oh! well,—never mind. So strongly do I hold this theory that when these children came into my care I resolved to seize the opportunity and see whether they worked out according to their parentage."

"But you only know the parentage of Bonnerdale," remonstrated the Vicar.

"I have a very fair idea of all their forbears anyway: Bonnerdale should be fairly clever with marked criminal tendencies. Eston should be refined, truthful, and honourable, although perhaps not very clever—it isn't really necessary, you know, if one is a gentleman. Whilst Esther should be more like Bonnerdale than Eston. Now, Arnold, what do you think of my theory?"

The Vicar felt indignant. How blind this man must be to think Esther would develop criminal

tendencies ! “ Does your theory,” he inquired, “ does your theory take environment into account ? ”

Fortune’s face beamed with joy. “ That is the test,” he cried. “ I believe in the prepotency of class types. I am testing them. Bonnerdale is in his natural sphere—— ”

“ How I hate that term ! ” the Vicar surprised himself by saying. “ As if any one is in his natural sphere unless he himself creates it.”

“ Eston is in a lower sphere than he was born into,” went on Fortune.

“ You have no proof ? ” returned the Vicar.

“ Come, come, man, the linen was superior, the woman who brought the child to Mrs. Sintell was of a superior class. Oh ! I think that is proof enough.”

“ Oh ! and what about Esther ? ”

“ Well, in that case I secured a higher class home for a lower class girl. It was good for you at the time, and good for my theory, so you understand me when I say my interest in these children is more scientific than charitable.”

“ But surely, Fortune, a different environment may do a lot of damage to your theory. If a child is born with elements of sweetness and simplicity, surely they will develop if allowed to. Unfortunately our slums are not likely to start such a happy growth, but except for the fact that they may put such a blighting influence upon a fresh young life, I believe the sinner and the saint—the poet, preacher, or parasite may come from any rank or station of society.”

Fortune raised his voice in loud protest, hardly heeding his words as he poured out a wild torrent

in reply. "Perhaps," he said finally, "you think the saints come from the slums and the sinners from the vicarages. I tell you class standards persist through the ages."

The Vicar winced, Fortune was letting his tongue run away with his finer instincts, he thought, and certainly a sinner may come from a vicarage—he knew only too well of one.

Fortune paused for a moment—Loverton's face was averted.

"I will not trouble you now with the details of my scheme," he concluded rather lamely. "But I must remind you that my theory is being proved to be correct. Bonnerdale has been vicious and untruthful during his short stay here; what must he be, over a longer time? Why, the very son of his father."

Loverton could contain himself no longer.

"You continually remind me of my Richard," he said. "My experience should be sufficient to cast grave doubts upon your theories. Like does not always beget like, the vicarage *may* produce the sinner, just as the slums may produce the saint. You know what kind of atmosphere Richard was born into,—surely the very best,—the home that mere theory would say was certain to produce the best type of man—and you know what Richard became; where is the soundness of your theories in the face of that?"

Augustine Fortune saw him bury his face in his hands. This was the first occasion he remembered Loverton to have referred to Richard since he had banished him from his life and—to all appearance—from his thoughts.

Fortune slowly advanced to where the Vicar stood

—still with his face covered by his hands. “Arnold,” he said, resting his hand upon his friend’s shoulder, “Arnold, old friend, have you heard from Richard since——?”

“Not a syllable. I was mad at the time, his mother had just been buried when he came here. Something seemed to run through me like a bar of iron, I could not bend my mercy to him, drove him out for the shame and the torture he had brought upon us. . . . I have never heard since then; he may be dead for all I know.”

Fortune paused a moment before speaking—he was wondering how much he should tell. “He is not dead,” he said finally.

“Not! How do you know. Have you seen him?”

“We have met and corresponded ever since.”

The Vicar raised his head and looked the other in the eyes. “God bless you,” he said simply. “He is dead to me, but—but thank you for your kindness to him.”

Fortune ventured to express a desire he had cherished for years. “My dearest wish is to see you reconciled,—I would do anything.”

“It cannot be,” the Vicar replied. “He killed his mother,—you know what she was to me, and he said himself he would never come to me again—he is my own son in his pride.”

“He is one of the finest men in England now,” replied Fortune. “A worthy son of his father. . . .” And then added slyly, “Why, he’s one of the chief props of my theory!”

CHAPTER VII

FROM DREAMS TO DUMPTON COURT

THE wonderful fortnight came to an end all too soon. Margaret and Dick, William and Jemima went over on the last day to say farewell to the Vicar and Esther—Dan Parrott leading and introducing them into the study, with much pomp and stateliness.

He and his wife had grown fond of the children during the time they had lived together. Even the annoying line and tiger episodes had passed from being regarded as a serious offence, and by now had come to be considered as a half-humorous illustration of the fact that boys will be boys, and an excellent supply of material for use in conversation at the “Waggoner’s Arms.”

The Vicar did not seem so reserved to the children as on a former occasion. He chatted gaily, eliciting quaint opinions and information in return,—whilst Esther, who had a curious knack for one so young of setting all these children at ease,—of leading the conversation from subject to subject when interest flagged ever so little, expressed through her wistful eyes an undercurrent of sorrow and regret at parting with these new acquaintances that had become so dear. Margaret, more shy than usual, was noticeably quiet. She had felt no particular enthusiasm for the country after the first few days, had missed the lights and bustle of traffic, the jostling of crowds

on the London pavements—the hundred and one diversifications that the great city affords, and to which Margaret's nature was particularly responsive.

The slow evenings spent in the cottage while Parrott or his wife tortuously unwound some tremendous trifle of their past history were a penance to Margaret. By nature she was light, mobile, fanciful, even frivolous. Now saying good-bye to Esther, she was shy and quiet.

The two young girls had been greatly attracted to each other by the affinity of opposites. No greater contrast could be imagined, for where Margaret switched on and off like some changing sky-sign in various colours, Esther was purposeful and steady.

Adieux are over. The children clamber into the trap again, the old mare jog-trots them back to the station, where Mr. and Mrs. Trent and the other children await them.

They entrain.

"I hope your mother isn't at the station," says Dick after a time.

"Why not?" asks Margaret in surprise.

"So I can carry your brown paper parcel and talk to you all the way home," replies Dick.

"You dear silly boy," she says. "Have you still got the little charm I bought for you?"

"Have I got it?"—in tones indicating the most sorrowful remonstrance that it should be doubted. "Have I got it? Do you think I'd ever part with it?"

"You might some day, Dicky, you know; some day you might get tired of me. You've known me ever so long as it is,—quite two months. Think of

having me always, for more than a year—a lot of years. I'm sure you'll get tired of me, won't you?"

He shook his head. "No! Margaret," he said, "I shall never get tired of you,—you might get tired of me. I'm so slow compared to you, but I'd do anything for you, dear Margaret, I'm so fond of you."

"Hush, Dick!" she enjoins. "You're speaking quite grown-up, and we are only children really, you know."

"We're not children," says Dick Bonnerdale passionately. "I shall soon be fourteen, and then I shall go out to work,—in ten years I shall save up a hundred pounds, and then we'll get married. We'll have a lovely house in the country, and we'll go for a walk every night, and hear the nightingales sing."

"Every night?" asks Margaret.

"Yes. Won't it be lovely?"

Margaret gives a little shudder. "In the winter as well?" she says.

"In the winter the birds go away to warmer countries," explains Richard.

"That's what I should want to do, Dick."

"Not when you saw the lovely house you'd have,—with a blazing fire, and roast chestnuts and baked apples a-sizzling away on the hob, and me sitting opposite and telling you stories I'd read. You wouldn't want to then, would you?"

"What! only us two?" says Margaret fearsomely. "And the wind a-howling round and down the chimney, and no shops to go out and see, no street lamps, only the bare black trees to frighten me?"

"Frightened! and me with you," exclaims Dick. "Oh, Margaret, I'm sure you will like it. Think of the spring and the young rabbits, and I'd go out shooting."

“Shooting the poor dear little rabbits?”

“Oh no!” says Dick gravely. “Only the poor old rabbits who would soon die if they wasn’t killed. And the flowers! and . . .”

“That just reminds me,” says Margaret, “I wonder who has been watering our geranium while I’ve been away.”

And so their conversation turns, as they are turning, back from the beauties of nature to Abraham Street and Dumpton Court.

To their surprise, Mr. Bring in his best attire was waiting on the platform for their arrival.

He hurried up the platform as the train steamed in, with elbows widely extended, his little eyes keenly searching for Margaret. He pretended not to see Richard.

“Hello! little fairy,” he said to Margaret,—“did you ’ave a nice time?”

“Yes, very nice, thank you.”

“Did you get my stamps?”

“Yes, thanks very much. My mother sent them down.”

“Don’t see yer mother,” said Mr. Bring regretfully. “I thought she might ’ave come to meet yer.”

“I don’t suppose she will,” replied Margaret. “She says I’m quite old enough by now to find my way about by myself.”

Mr. Bring was lost in admiration. “Smart woman, your mother, smart, superior ideas. ’Ow proud you must be ter ’ave such a mother. Well! we must see about getting ’ome. Let’s carry yer luggage for yer. We can get the penny ’bus to the corner of the Bank. Where’s yer parcel, my dear?”

Dick, who had been standing by and looking upon Bring with evident disfavour, gripped Margaret's luggage tightly. "I've got it," he said, "and I'm going to take it home for her."

Mr. Bring stepped back a pace or two, and calmly surveyed the strange creature who dared to oppose him.

The inspection over, he promptly seized Dick by the coat-collar with one hand, and pulled his ear with the other. "Look 'ere, young feller me lad (*tug*), none of yer imperence (*tug*), the young lady (*tug*) don't want you a-hangin' round, when I'm 'ere to 'elp (*tug*), and—what's more (*tug*), I'll see (*tug*) you (*tug*) don't."

He flung the boy from him to the ground and turned gallantly to Margaret. "Now that 'ere little affair's settled, my dear," he said, "we'll see about gettin' 'ome."

To his great surprise, Margaret struck him in the face. She was like a little fury,—for a few moments he was taken by surprise. "'Ere, 'old 'ard," he cried plaintively.

Dick had risen from the ground by this time, and now rushed into the fray. Bring put up his fists, and again the boy went down, but not before getting in a blow upon Bring's lower lip. He turned to Margaret pleadingly. "Well, strike old Peter pink," he said, "I comes 'ere to 'elp you 'ome, and this is what I gets. I ain't done nobody any 'arm. I thought this 'ere boy was a stranger, coming it like, and so I treated him accordin', and this is the consequence,—this is what comes of trying to do a good turn."

"Well, what did you push Dick down for?" demanded Margaret,

"Is 'is name Dick?" Mr. Bring was interested. "I 'ad a brother o' the name o' Dick, nice feller he was; he would 'ave a-bin a big feller by now, only 'e died young." He paused to observe the effect of his words. "'E was a nice feller, only 'ad one little fault in 'is features, or else 'e might 'ave been 'andsome. . . . Dick . . . nice name. Only one fault in 'is features. And if this 'ere young feller—beg your pardon, Mr. Dick—if you are as nice a feller as my brother, your namesake, was, well, I'll be proud to know yer."

Dick glowered ominously. He had distrusted this oily rogue from the first.

"There's the right 'and o' fellowship, Mr. Dick," continued Bring, "a 'onest 'and, though I says it."

Dick refused to accept it, but Margaret caught his hand and placed it in Bring's.

"And now everything's all right again, Dick," she said.

After working Dick's unwilling arm up and down for some minutes like a pump-handle, Mr. Bring assured Margaret that of all the Dicks he had ever met, none came so near the ideal of his brother as this one.

"'E's better looking than my brother even," he said critically. "You see, 'e 'ad a little fault in 'is features which this one ain't got."

"What was wrong with his features?"

"Well, my dear, it was like this. 'E 'ad a fine face exceptin' that 'e 'ad a shy chin."

"A shy chin! Whatever is that?"

"It's^r the family skellington, missie. All the members of our fambly that's a-going to die young

are born with the shy chin. And a shy chin is a chin that's so shy it tries to hide itself in the neck. It's not considered very 'andsome, miss, and that was my brother Dick's only failin'."

At last the bundles were allotted satisfactorily. Bring insisted on carrying Dick's, who still resolutely refused to let go Margaret's. So they proceeded over the bridge to the omnibus that rattled them homewards.

"My lip's gettin' rather big," remarked Mr. Bring pleasantly, as they prepared to part from each other. "You've got a beautiful left-hander, Mr. Dick; you ought to practise a bit, and I shouldn't be surprised to see you at Wonderland one o' these days. Good night, my dear. I hope yer mother's not worried about things,—she seemed a bit down, poor thing, when I called the other day. If I can do anythink, you know, missie, I'll do it. I've taken quite a fancy to you—and your mother. So just let me know 'ow you go on, will you, dear?"

Margaret promised readily. Bring raised his check cap and sauntered away.

"You mustn't be vindictive towards him," said Margaret to Richard. "I think he's really a kind-hearted man, but he has got rather funny ways. He was truly sorry for hitting you, wasn't he?"

"Yes, I think he was . . . sorry he didn't hit me harder!"

"Oh, Dicky, you mustn't say such things,—you will only make enemies."

"Enemies!" said Dick scornfully. "Where are my friends in Abraham Street or Dumpton Court? Everybody but you is my enemy, and I am their

enemy. I hate their ways, their dirt, their mean little lives,—those poky rooms in narrow streets will kill me if I stay,—but I won't stay. I'll go into open spaces—into the air where I can breathe. When I am a man and we are married,—and you'll be glad to come away too, won't you?—to some place like Ponderbridge,—some pretty little place in the country."

"Oh, Dick, I wish you wouldn't speak like that,—you are nobody's enemy, you mustn't be so discontented. I am glad to be home again. Besides, you are not speaking the truth when you say everybody but me is your enemy. Lots of people like you,—look at Peter Vetry in our house,—he worships you, and you told me yourself how nice Mr. Richards, the 'Poor Man's Lawyer,' is to you."

"I had forgotten them, Margaret. I suppose I'm wild about that man at the station. Good night, Margaret."

"Good night, Dick. Don't worry about these things. You see if it don't turn out all right in the end."

"It will, Margaret, if I always have you standing up for me. Good night."

Margaret turned up the courtway, crossed the familiar square, climbed the flights of stairs, and pushed open the door of the room she shared with her mother. All was in darkness,—she was alone, her mother was out. There was no great affection between parent and child, yet Margaret felt dull at heart,—it is sad to be neglected even by one who gives no love. Her bright warm nature received a chill,—that night she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE "POOR MAN'S LAWYER"

ABRAHAM STREET was a collection of mean, small houses which were full of large families.

A few shops supplied the absolute necessities of life,—to wit, two public-houses, named respectively "The Ship" and "The Hawk and Dove,"—one pawnshop, which exposed for sale second-hand clothing, cheap tinsel jewellery, and vases of atrocious design and colour,—one rag-and-bone shop, which was open to buy up anybody at four pounds a penny, and which supplied a much-needed touch of colour to the neighbourhood, by having a picture gallery plastered over the windows depicting the remarkable prosperity that descended upon their regular customers,—and one very small chandler's shop that sold almost everything from glue to kippers, from bread and tea to coals and paraffin oil, this shop being "Tofflin's."

On the windows of one of the houses which stood out from the rest by virtue of its clean appearance and brightness, were painted the words :

POOR MAN'S LAWYER
LEGAL ADVICE FREE.

In the course of five years Mr. Richards, the gentleman thus advertised, had heard many strange

stories, and rendered much useful service to local people,—the legal work ranging from all kinds of County Court summonses to claims for compensation, as in Mrs. Angel's case.

No fees of any kind were asked for, the work being purely a charitable effort on the part of Mr. Richards, who paid the rent of the premises himself, and only worked with other organisations, insomuch that he sometimes made inquiries about people of the Reverend Lionel Pontifex, the Vicar of the local church of St. Olave's.

A tall, clean-shaven man, with clear-cut features, alert, always having the appearance of a well-groomed thoroughbred, Mr. Richards had made a goodly number of friends among his neighbours and poor clientele. Something over thirty years old, one would say, looking older in repose and younger in action.

The front room of the house he rented was furnished with some oak chairs round a table of the same wood, on which stood an aspidestra in a blue art pot.

A few reproductions of Turner's glorious pictures hung upon the walls. Soft cream muslin curtains edged with blue gallooning draped the windows, linoleum and two rugs covered the floor ;—altogether an unusual waiting-room for a " Poor Man's Lawyer."

People in the neighbourhood spoke about this room with bated breath, to Mr. Richards' great satisfaction,—it was totally unlike what they were used to.

He had hoped to instil some desire for better surroundings into the hearts of these poor drab lives—especially among the older children and

younger adults. He had hoped to oppose the pink and lustre vases of the pawnshop by graceful, inexpensive earthenware, and so far had met with some slight success.

Through the back-room door labelled

CONSULTATION ROOM

the searcher after justice passed into the presence of Mr. Richards himself.

More business-like—a large roll-top desk occupied a prominent position in this room, which also contained a small table, two large comfortable-looking arm-chairs, and a desk-chair. The mantelpiece supported some photographs, and over it hung a splendid reproduction in colours of Watts' "Hope"—a special favourite of Mr. Richards'.

A movable calendar stood upon the desk, and announced the 21st of June,—a few books and papers lay upon the small table.

Mr. Richards—barrister-at-law—was sitting in the desk-chair writing when the door bell was set a-ringing.

He jumped up, and greeted Mrs. Angel, who had entered the waiting-room.

"Come right in, Mrs. Angel," he said cheerily.

He motioned her to an arm-chair, and took his seat again at the desk.

"I thought I'd just come in," she said, speaking as though she had to make an effort to appear at ease. "Thought I'd just come in and see how the Compensation's going on."

"Yes, of course," Mr. Richards spoke in a re-

freshing voice that was good to hear. "I'm afraid matters are still very much as they were, Mrs. Angel. Marland and Jellow are very astute business people, who won't part with their money very readily. But, of course, as I tell them, everything in this case is plain and open. I really see no reason for such excessive caution. The case would win, no doubt, in a court of law, but I think you will agree with me when I say if this matter can be settled by agreement it is ever so much better than by litigation. Law is a very expensive business, you know, Mrs. Angel."

"I'm sure you know best, sir," she said. "But it does seem hard to keep me and my daughter waiting like this."

"Yes, it does. How is your daughter, Mrs. Angel?"

"Very well, thank you."

"She went into the country a few weeks ago,—did she enjoy it very much?"

"Very much, thank you. It was kind of you to speak for her."

"I am very glad to hear that she enjoyed it,—and now, Mrs. Angel, how are you yourself? I hope you will not allow this delay to worry you. Now . . . how about money?"

"My husband was a very careful man—he had a bit saved up. It won't last much longer, but that doesn't matter very much. I'm trying to get a situation."

"Oh, indeed! I wish you every success. What sort of business do you intend to go in for?"

"'Public' business,—I used to be a barmaid, you see."

Perhaps it was her imagination that when he spoke again his voice sounded much less cheery.

"I see. Well! Mrs. Angel, you must not allow yourself to become depressed. You must get out to amusements occasionally, you know."

"Oh, I do! I'm going to the theatre on Thursday night."

"Indeed? Is it a very good piece?"

"Well, that I don't know. Beggars can't be choosers. I mustn't grumble if it's a bad one, because I'm having the ticket given to me."

"I hope you'll have a good time."

"Thank you. A man named Bring gave me the tickets—you might know him about here?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

"Very kind of him,—he waited for my little girl coming out of school, and told her he'd been thinking how lonely I should be, would I like to accept two tickets, one each for myself and a friend, to the pit?"

"I see. Very good of him. And have you a friend to go with?"

"Oh yes, a friend who's trying to recommend me to her place. She's a barmaid too. I thought if I got her to come with me,—it's her night out, you see,—it might help me on to get the situation. Her name's Verinder, Poppy Verinder,—perhaps you've heard of her, she used to be on the stage."

"No, I'm afraid I don't know many celebrities," he said. "I will go to Marland and Jellow again, Mrs. Angel, and see what they are going to do. If you will come in again shortly I will try to have something definite to tell you."

He opened the door. Mrs. Angel walked out with

a rather affected gait. "Good night," she said in her best company manner.

"Good night, Mrs. Angel. If Maggie would like to come here and tell me how she spent her holiday at Ponderbridge, please send her along—I shall be glad to see her."

Mrs. Angel would have been much surprised if she could have seen his attitude after her visit.

He sat looking straight before him—his head resting upon his hands,—careworn and sad.

The thought of Ponderbridge always stirred up anxious feelings; he could hardly hear the name spoken and remain unmoved,—Mr. Richards—the poor man's lawyer—was Richard Loverton—barrister, and son of the Vicar of Ponderbridge.

Dick Bonnerdale came in a little later with Margaret and at once livened things up.

"And how did you like your holiday?" Mr. Richards asked of Margaret.

"It was very nice," she replied; "but I don't think I could live there always."

"No, I suppose not."

"But it was really nice, and Mr. and Mrs. Parrott were good old sticks when you knew them a bit, weren't they, Dick? Have you ever been to Ponderbridge, Mr. Richards?"

"Not recently—I think I remember Mr. and Mrs. Parrott, though; they are real good people. Did you see the Vicar at all?"

"Yes," said Maggie. "Rather! and that Missie Esther—she's lovely—do you remember her as well?"

"No, Margaret, I have never seen her. Dick, what adventures did you have?"

"The greatest adventure, I suppose," replied Dick, "was in trying to raise some money."

"Oh! tell me all about it."

"It wasn't anything very great, but, you see, my aunt seemed to have an idea that I rarely, if ever, want a change of underclothing, but Mrs. Parrott had other ideas, and actually bought me a change out of her own pocket. Of course, I couldn't let her do that, so I went out day after day, and I just got enough to pay her back."

"Good man!" said Mr. Richards. "Splendid—and what did you do?"

"Found out some golf-links, and got a job as caddie for two days,—that was a jolly good leg-up, you know. Well, then—you know the little river there—the Ponder—well, some lady was going along with her dog—one of those whipper-snapper things that people fusses up like babies—and all of a sudden the dog went and fell in the river. I jumped in—it's only about three feet deep, you know,—and fished the dog out by the tail. You should have seen the look in her face—the lady's, I mean—she was howling like 'billy-ho.' Well—she gave me half a crown, and sent me a letter with the Gospel of St. Mark in it,—another jolly good leg-up, wasn't it? I was able to pay Mrs. Parrott her money. Lucky, wasn't I?"

"I'm glad of that," said Mr. Richards. "Mrs. Parrott is a real good sort."

"Dick's ever so plucky," added Margaret. "There was a big boy down our court who used to pull my hair,—much bigger than Dick, but he didn't care—he offered him out,—you know, best or worst,—and they had a fight,—and Dick won—too."

"Now, Maggie," said Dick, in expostulation, "don't give me away. 'Ere, Mr. Richards, what do you think this Maggie went and done,—she had saved up two and threepence halfpenny—and she spent every blessed penny on other people—bought a brooch for her mother, and a little pendant for me,—like it, Mr. Richards?—and a—no, Maggie, I won't leave off—a present for that poor crippled girl in Dumpton Court—and I do believe she's got something for you."

"There!" said Margaret, with a pretty air of exasperation. "Fancy giving me away like that. I hope you won't be offended, Mr. Richards, it's only a little framed view of the Vicarage and Mrs. Parrott's cottage. I thought you wouldn't mind accepting it. It was very kind of you to recommend me for going away."

Richard Loverton's eyes grew dim for a moment. He looked at the picture hurriedly, and, with a rapid word of thanks, changed the subject.

"You are both good young people," he said, "Dick and Maggie. I'm really proud to know you, and hope you will always look upon me as a friend. Now, Dick, how are you getting on at home?"

"Same as ever. They seem to have made up their minds that I'm cast for the villain of the piece,—I'm beginning to worry about it. I wonder if they can possibly be right? Do you think my future life can turn out bad if I make up my mind to be a good man?"

"No!" said Mr. Richards. "I think we pretty nearly create our own lives. You have just left school, you are just tasting the sweets of independene,

—it has its bitters as well,—you will taste those later on, by the way. You are just beginning life with a violent distaste for the kind of life other people about here put up with. Now, Dick, what is to prevent you from getting the sort of life you really want?"

"I wondered whether circumstances may not be too strong to fight against," the boy replied. "You know,—like a shot that's fired through the barrel of a gun,—it has to keep on in the same straight line even when it comes out."

"You think your past life will govern your future?"

"Yes, in a way. I wonder if I shall have to play a part in life against my own desires?"

"I think," interpolated Maggie, "that men and boys are like water, in the long run they find their own true level, if they don't evaporate first, like the teacher says in chemistry at school."

"And so do I," agreed Mr. Richards. "Dick, you're deciding your future life now, your present intentions will be the driving force to whatever you manage to do in life. Now, how are you getting along with your 'governor'? Do you like your work? Is Mr. Jaggins a decent sort to work for?"

"Well," replied Dick, "I can't very well judge a man after working for him a month, but I don't love him very much up to the present."

"No? He ought to be a good sort. What is he at St. Olave's—sidesman or something, isn't he?"

"Much more important than that," said Margaret quickly.

"He's a churchwarden," continued Dick,—“calls the factory ‘Providence’ Works,—sweats every-

body who works for him, and gives glory to God every Sunday for helping him to prosper."

"You think he is a hypocrite?" asked Mr. Richards.

"Not exactly. I think he's a narrow-minded man, full of bigotry and obstinacy, and," he added, "with a soul that's too hard to knock a nail into, let alone send to heaven. But there! don't let us talk about his soul. Why, he went to a church outing the other week—went to Burnham Beeches, and since he's been back, the only thing he says when people ask him what he thought of the place, is, 'It ain't so bad, get a nice tea for ninepence in the house close 'andy, but, you know, it grieves me 'art to see such a fine lot o' wood for chairs a-standing there wasting away for want of cutting.' And that's all the use his soul is to him."

"But you know," said Mr. Richards, "I am told by Mr. Pontifex that Mr. Jaggins was a liberal subscriber to the new vestry-room——"

"Opened his heart like," suggested Dick. "Well, all I can say is, it's a pity somebody didn't drop a brick into it when it was open, and keep it open a little longer, because I'm sure it ain't very often taken like that."

A bell was heard to tinkle in the outer room.

"You've got a customer, sir," the young people said in chorus, "so we'll bid you good night, sir."

A moment later they were gone, and a dismal man with a dismal face came in—Mr. Richards settled down to some dismal business.

CHAPTER IX

THE VICAR ASSAILS THE THEORY

ARNOLD LOVERTON thought over the conversation with Fortune many times during the following months.

He found that he disagreed with his old friend's theory. Human nature was an unexplored field so far as science had touched it, he considered. True, he admitted, physical resemblance and odd tricks of habit and mannerisms are often transmitted from parent to child, but in the main he thought Fortune's sweeping idea that everything worked out according to pattern was absurd. He began to notice the greater flaws in the theory,—how, for instance, did Fortune know the kind of parents Bonnerdale's father had had?—if they, too, had been burglarious by nature and intent?—or whether, as was possible, he was the scapegrace of a gentle family? Such things have happened, he reflected. Assuming this to have been the case, why should not the boy, Richard Bonnerdale, hark back to the original straight, honest family, rather than follow his father in the paths of crime? Again, what of the boy's mother? Surely she had been honest enough. Criminals are not as a rule shocked when they hear of another's crime,—why should he not resemble his mother or one of her forbears?

Human nature was a compound of so many

unknown elements,—so many far-back ancestors contributed their mites to every new-born babe's equipment, that to say one must inevitably be exactly like one's father or mother was, on the face of it, ridiculous. Again, to what extent did personal volition count in that which makes a trustworthy man or a rogue,—a being self-reliant, or a clinging parasite? And had he not overlooked the tremendous influence of environment? *That* kept a man in the path trodden by his fathers more than heredity. This precious theory took no account of the individual's power of choice which Christianity insists upon, but which is so difficult to exercise when circumstances are dead against one. One good had resulted from the children's visit,—it had at least awakened his interest in their lives, in their destinies, and in their environment. He read many books upon the subject, slum stories, records of the underworld,—studied sweating as a cognate subject, pored over vital statistics hidden away in Blue Books,—even begun to formulate some decided opinions upon the housing question.

These represent, as it were, the scientific aspect of his awakening interest, but side by side with this was also a broadening charity, a heart learning to labour with sympathy and love. He saw that the mission of Christianity was unfulfilled while these things endured.

To his great surprise a chance reference of his to Esther revealed the fact that her sympathies had been working in the same direction. She had read aloud from a newspaper concerning the death by fire of a starving infant.

The child had been left alone by its mother, a widow, who had gone out to seek for food. The poor little child, left in the bare, cheerless room, thought of the fairies other children spoke about,—of how they guided little boys like himself into fairy realms, which for the moment to him was nothing better than a place where there was plenty to eat.

He found a box of matches, struck one, and asked for a good fairy to come with eatables for his mother—but she tarried. He struck another—still Titania lingered with her train. He set light to the whole of the box at once, which flared up and set his poor little flannelette nightgown on fire,—so he rushed from the room, shouting out that a bad fairy had set him alight.

The agonised mother collapsed when she returned and was told her little boy was dead.

So ran the article in a few brief paragraphs, while next to it was half a column concerning the legacy a lady had left for the maintenance of her pet pug-dog.

The Vicar groaned. “Oh, God!” he said. “And this is Christian England!”

Esther was weeping.

“Oh! I would do anything to give that poor mother back her boy,” she sobbed. “I wish I knew what I could do.”

The Vicar endeavoured to console her. “You are so young,” he said. “Esther dear, your life is before you,—will you not devote part of it to the service of these poor things?”

“I will indeed,” said Esther, “with all my heart,”

The Vicar felt impelled to tell her something of Fortune's theory. "I am getting too old now, Esther, to do very much," he said. "Next month I shall complete my sixtieth year, but I disagree most strongly with this theory, or, indeed, any theory, about the fixity of human nature. I believe we may all rise to the heights or sink to the depths; but for some the way is harder than for others. If ever you are able, dear, help these poor things to see the glories of life, the presence of God in all things, and help them to fight for the temporal things as well as for the spiritual. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. I blame myself, for while I have been here pleasantly dreaming life away, souls have been struggling for a breath of true life, and bodies have been wasting for lack of mere bread. It is wonderful to me that all people stricken by poverty are not criminals,—they must be terribly tempted. Oh! I wish comfortable people would ask themselves honestly what position in life they would have attained had they been born in a slum and subjected to the same awful circumstances. If I were not so old, Esther, I would give up this pleasant life,—this land of roses and peacefulness, and go into the slums, giving my body and my substance to the poor."

"And I would be glad to go with you, dear uncle. Often I have thought of those girls who came here in the spring. I have thought of what their lives must be. I should so like to be with them, and help them, if that were possible."

Day after day their thoughts and conversation turned upon these matters.

The Vicar referred again and again to Fortune's theory. He conducted a correspondence on the subject with his old friend, who was now in the Norwegian Fiords, sending him at last a newspaper cutting that he considered routed the enemy completely.

It concerned another fire episode, about a young hooligan who was despised and rejected even by his own family, as a work-shy, lazy, ne'er-do-weel. A fire broke out in an oil-shop near to his favourite lounge. In the rooms above lived a man and wife, with a large family. Without pausing for a moment, this young outcast dashed into the flames and saved a child. Six times he went in, and succeeded in saving a precious life each time. At last his face and hands were black and charred, his clothes reduced to ashes, but again he went in—to his death.

"What kind of fixity of type is this?" he inquired. "Whatever it is, humanity knows no finer. People thought he was devoid of the finer instincts of mankind, yet when the call came he nobly responded."

No reply was forthcoming to this, so the Vicar concluded that Fortune was travelling.

"Esther," asked Arnold Loverton suddenly at breakfast one morning, "do you think I am too old to start a new life?"

Esther was silent for a few moments.

"I dare not say what I think," she then replied. "But whatever you do, dear uncle, I will gladly come with you and share your work."

"Thank you," he said simply. "If the Bishop of London will give me a living, I will volunteer for active service—in the slums,"

CHAPTER X

“THE PLAY’S THE THING”

MR. BRING considered his gift of a pass to the theatre a veritable master-stroke of diplomacy. Mrs. Angel would go with a friend, would be allowed to enjoy the first act to the end, by which time the romance of the melodrama would have had a chance to soften her heart. Then in the interval he would appear, dressed in his best, with a flower in his button-hole ; naturally she would connect him with the hero, her heart would yearn for the affection of such a dear, kind man,—and then at a suitable moment he would ask her to be his adored one.

Now Mrs. Demmy exhibited a play-bill outside her door, advertising this theatre, for which she was occasionally rewarded by a free pass or two, to the pit.

Upon great occasions Mrs. Demmy, with a stout lady who lived opposite (who sold sheep’s trotters by day in the neighbouring market-place, and rejoiced in the name of Susan Doddery),—shared this pass and the evening together. A riotous repast of mussels off a stall in the High Street always took place before the feast of drama, sundry refreshments of a spirituous nature during the intervals, and a Lord Mayor’s banquet of fried fish in newspaper on the way home,—a peripatetic spread. Great occasions were these,—wonderful garments had to

be discovered in chests of drawers,—both of the ladies came out stiff and unbending in black silk brocades and satin.

It was a common saying in Puritan Row that Mrs. Demmy looked a regular "stunner" when she *was* made up, and Mrs. Dodderly "fancied her luck" a bit as well.

Such events were too sacred to be oft repeated, so usually Mrs. Demmy gave the passes in turn to her lodgers.

Perhaps Mr. Bring got them oftener than strict justice would have allowed, for Mrs. Demmy really had a soft spot in her heart for him. She was greatly shocked when Ginger Stodd told her of the base use to which Bring was about to put the latest pass. "'E's give it to the party that 'e's 'anging 'is hat up to?" she said incredulously, upon hearing the news.

"'Eard 'im tell the little girl with me own pair of shears," responded Stodd. "It jist shows 'ow deep Billy is."

"I'll stop it!" she said. "I'll stop it. . . . See if I don't. . . . It's—a . . . it's a liberty! Connivering thing she must be! My pass an' all!—I'll stop it. Jist you wait and see, Ginger."

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Mr. Bring eclipsed himself upon the great night. His attire was so brightened and brushed, his face so red and shining, it was as though the old original Bring that we knew at first had been apotheosised.

The play was entitled "The Bandits of the Larozone," and concerned a very sweet young damsel

engaged to a very handsome young nobleman in disguise, who sheepishly followed her through three acts and fourteen scenes among the bandits, in order to find out that she was a lady of high degree, and to prove that he was not what he seemed, but of rather better quality, and a dark-browed villain hatching unfertile plots like so many bad eggs, who came on from time to time with slow music, and went off with groans and hisses at his double-dyed villainy.

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Mrs. Angel and Miss Poppy Verinder were enjoying it. They hung upon the sweet, tremulous words of the fair damsel, while behind them Mr. Bring was trying to memorise the manly outbursts from the handsome hero's lips. The curtain fell upon Act 1.

All unknown to Mr. Bring, a pair of dark eyes were watching him at a little distance—dark eyes, angry and jealous, taking in his every movement, as he advanced to the ladies in front.

He bowed. "'Evenin', mam," he said gallantly to Mrs. Angel. "'Evenin', miss."

Mrs. Angel graciously bent her head and made room for him to sit between her and Miss Poppy,—the latter quickly taking stock of him in a few sharp glances.

"Well, ladies," said Mr. Bring, crossing his legs, "'ow d'yer like the play?"

"Very nice, isn't it, dear?" said Mrs. Angel to Miss Poppy.

"Not bad," replied that lady, with professional

reserve.—“Didn’t care very much for Tootham Shorter, but Basil Undermere is good, isn’t he?”

“Well, if she ain’t a marvel!” exclaimed Mr. Bring admiringly; “knows ’em by name too. What a mem’ry to ’ave!”

Mrs. Angel was not averse to hearing the friend from whom she desired favours thus praised, and graciously rewarded him with a smile.

“I ought to remember poor Bassy,—we used to call Basil Bassy, you see,” condescended the lively Miss Poppy. “We played together in ‘The Convict’s Pardon’—perhaps you remember it?—it made a great stir in its day. Surely you remember ‘The Convict’s Pardon’ at the old ‘Granite’ Theatre?”

Mr. Bring really could not remember it,—he apologised. “Must have heard of it,” he said, but “had a shaky memory.”

“I sang a song to the baby,—doll, you see, dressed up. I was the convict’s wife starving, slow music, limelight, white face, you know, singing to baby. You remember it, don’t you, Jane?”

Mrs. Angel murmured she could never forget it.

“Made a wonderful hit, that did,—people crying their eyes out. Some people came night after night, they enjoyed it so much, me starving and singing to the child. Why, some of ’em were so touched they threw pennies on the stage for me to go and buy some food with.”

“It was lovely,” said Mrs. Angel rapturously.

“Must ha’ been,” Mr. Bring agreed. Then he espied a tall, thin man walking through the ranks holding on high a tray with glasses of beer. “Hi!” he shouted. “Long ’un! come over here.”

The tall man came over, and found he had just three glasses left. Mr. Bring promptly bought them, and tipped the man twopence with a magnificent air of "Money's no object to me."

Mr. Bring drank health to the ladies and sat down again. The conversation flagged,—he looked down at his trousers, and at once found a fertile subject for conversation.

"'Ow the poor do stick to a crease!" he remarked philosophically. "If a man has a Sunday suit, don't 'is missis see that he don't spoil the crease?"

"Whatever for?" girlishly volunteered the elderly Miss Poppy.

"It's like this, you see,—every Sunday a poor man's missis says, she says,—'For 'Eving's sake, Bill or Tom or whatever his name might be, you know what I mean, don't go and dirty them clothes, and don't let the youngsters climb round you with toffee all over their 'ands, and their clothes all over 'ardbake, because if you do, down goes the soot ter fifteen shillings on Monday mornin',' meanin' the pawnshop, you see."

"Faney that now, Poppy!" murmured the widow.

"Creases," continued Mr. Bring, much encouraged, "is what divides 'umanity and womanity too, as a woman's generally about as high up in the world as 'er 'usband, in the manner of speakin', and if 'e's got the crease in his trousers, he can always take 'is place with anybody—even the upper classes. So can 'is missis. But once 'is crease is gone, 'e's gone,—over the line,—no class at once." This piece of philosophy exhausted Mr. Bring's resources, so he

lapsed into silence for the remainder of the interval. The band struck up a lively tune, Mr. Bring returned to his original seat, and sat there until the conclusion of Act 2.

During this Act Miss Poppy and Mrs. Angel had been speaking in whispers about Bring.

“Wherever did you dig him up from?” Miss Poppy commenced. “Who is he?”

“I’m not quite sure,” replied the widow. “I know he drives a brake sometimes, and he’s taken quite a fancy to my little girl, but more than that I don’t know, and don’t very much care.”

“I should think not indeed,” whispered the other. “He certainly’s not your style. I’m rather surprised you’ve took up with ’im at all, or ever let ’im think there was any hope.”

“Surely he don’t think anything like that,” exclaimed the widow in a horrified whisper.

“I’ll bet he does, you little innercent,” said the artful Miss Poppy. “He’s hanging his hat up to you, don’t you make no mistake.”

“Oh, well, if that’s so, I shall have to put him in his place.”

“I should think so indeed, or else I couldn’t recommend you to the ‘Golden Dragon,’ I couldn’t really, Jenny. I was knocked when he started speaking about creases in trousers,—there’s a thing to talk about! And you used to be so particular who you spoke to in the old days, eh, Jenny?”

“Yes, you’re quite right, Poppy,” murmured the widow in a far-away voice.

“You know—Mr. Reg, eh?” slyly suggested the other. “You never told us about him, artful puss,

but I don't blame you for keeping your business to yourself. Besides, we didn't know each other very well then, did we, dear? Me on the boards at the 'Granite,' and you in the bar there,—how was I to know which was Mr. Reg from the other young toffs?"

"Don't remind me," entreated the widow. "Don't bring up old memories, Poppy. I want to start all over again, as if I was a young girl. I want you to speak up for me at the 'Golden Dragon,' dear, for old times' sake,—I shall never forget the favour, if you will."

"All right, Jenny, I'll put a word in for you with the governor. You'll find that'll be all right. Only mind, no truck with people like 'im."

"You can rely on me, Poppy," was the reply. "I'll soon tell him off."

Mr. Bring advanced gallantly at the end of the second act, a little too gallantly, but pride proverbially goes before a fall.

"What d'ye think of Bassy What's-'is-name now, miss?" he said jauntily to Miss Poppy.

She ignored him, but rather loudly said to Mrs. Angel: "Worst of these East-End theatres—there's always so many roughs trying to force their conversation on respectable women."

It was physically impossible for Mr. Bring to get redder in the face without bursting, so he turned pale, and stammered unintelligibly.

Mrs. Angel looked up at him sharply. "What, again!" she exclaimed. "Can't you leave us in peace for a few minutes? You're not much of a gentleman."

Utterly crushed by this cruel reversal of his dreams,

Bill Bring walked down the gangway, intending to go out somewhere, anywhere, and drown his sorrows in drink.

As he passed Mrs. Demmy she rose and clutched his arm,—she understood what had happened.

He gave a start of surprise.

“What, you ’ere?” he said.

“Yes, Bill. I felt a bit queer while I was a-sittin’ ’ere, but I don’t feel so bad now. Do you mind seein’ me ’ome?”

Bill’s clouded face gradually cleared—the redness came back again. “Yes, cert’n’y, missis, anythink to oblige you.”

CHAPTER XI

WALKER JAGGINS, ESQUIRE

THE final result of the evening at the theatre was fairly satisfactory to Mrs. Angel. Her friend had promised to speak for her to the proprietor of the "Golden Dragon," and held out a hope that was almost a certainty, that the recommendation would be successful. For the next few weeks the widow walked on air. Meeting Mr. Bring one day, him she snubbed with the air of a parvenu ignoring her grocer.

Of Margaret she grew more and more neglectful. Mother and daughter saw very little of each other in those days, and did not wish to see more, for it is only in rare instances that absence makes the heart grow fonder. As a rule, absence makes the heart forget. They shared one bed, but at unequal times,—Margaret out in the street after school hours with nothing to climb up the three flights of stairs for, except occasional meals during the day, retired to rest at ten every night,—while her mother retired at all times in the early morning, and stopped in bed until midday. Then after dinner she spent some hours making a careful toilette before going out again, and repeated the round.

As Dick could not leave work until after eight every night, his company was denied to Margaret to some extent at this time, although Jemima, now the accepted sweetheart of Will Eston, made up a

little for the great blanks in her life. She now drifted into paths a young girl never ought to tread. Perambulating barrel organs lured her on every day from street to street—she took a pride in dancing to their unmelodic strains outside public-houses and worse places than those, where uncouth men and women spoke and behaved like beasts.

Sunday saw Margaret at the “Sisters”—an unfinished edifice inhabited by a Roman Catholic Sisterhood of Mercy, who had much trouble with small boys every Sunday because they never quite understood the catechism, and always bawled for the bun about half an hour before closing time.

This bun was the great inducement to go to the “Sisters.” Certainly Margaret and Jemima went for no other reason, except perhaps for the fun of being jostled and pushed—and possibly after all to be robbed of the bun on the way home.

Sunday night was the one bright spot in all their lives. Boys and girls from Margaret’s age upwards made a pilgrimage by Liverpool Street, round by the Bank, along Fleet Street to the Strand,—then turned back and came home.

Some potent call must be heard, for so many to leave their alleys and their mean streets every Sunday, dressed in their poor best, to walk those highways where wealth and business reign all the week, but resign their supremacy on Sunday.

They come for miles, every approach to the Bank is alive with the humanity known as the poorer classes,—a constant stream of eager, babbling youth, smoking, talking, courting, and chaffing, playing the hero once a week on their life’s stage.

Richard and Margaret always walked before, with Will Eston and Jemima behind, upon these great promenades. Richard, eager and ambitious, pouring out his hopes and visions for his future career,—Margaret more silent than of old; Eston and Jemima getting involved in long discussions commencing, “So ‘e says to ‘er, ‘e says, look ‘ere, ‘e says,” of extreme unimportance. So they walked months away.

Dick found his new employer a strange study.

Mr. Jaggins was a little man with a large amount of dignity, who spoke in a sepulchral voice in moments of repose, but in a squeaky falsetto when excited.

A great person at St. Olave’s, a very small person at home, and a domineering person in his factory, which was a small, two-storied building erected upon what should have been his back garden, and sheltering some seven employees, counting Dick.

In appearance he was striking by reason of his strangeness. If nature had jumbled up bodies and limbs and heads before he was born, then sorted out the odd sizes of each, and joined those together in a freakish moment, the result would have been not unlike Mr. Jaggins. He had a large bulbous head on a slender neck,—a long body with ridiculously small legs and rather big feet. His two twinkling little eyes burned in deep sockets, and were bushed round with thick eyebrows. His mouth, although not visible beneath his heavy moustache, really drooped downwards at each corner.

At the church he was urbane and bland,—at home cajoling,—in the workshop coarse and blustering.

He bullied Richard unmercifully, but at times repented. "You know, Dick," he said in a particularly expansive moment, "I don't want you to take all I say to heart, although you do put me out sometimes."

"That's all right, gov'nor," Dick cheerfully assured him. "I never take any notice of what you say."

Mr. Jaggins took some time to get over his annoyance at this rebuff.

His business was the making of chairs, his hobby was to play the rôle of the great organiser in connection with the church.

At "Providence Works" he underpaid for his materials and the labour he employed, which in turn enabled him to undersell his competitors in the trade. Success in business is practically assured on these lines, yet Mr. Jaggins modestly ascribed it all to Providence. At the church he was in great demand as the secretary of this or the treasurer of that, indeed, just at this time he was getting up a concert for some fund or other in which he figured as hon. secretary.

Mr. Jaggins possessed at least one trait in common with other great minds, he was always on the lookout for fresh talent.

"Dicky, me boy," he always spoke affably when he wanted anything, "Dick, do you sing?"

"No, gov'nor," confessed Dick.

"Do you like music?"

"Very much indeed: I love music."

"H'm, all right. I'll sell you a ticket for our little church concert next Wednesday, sixpence; needn't

pay me now; I'll stop it out of your wages o' Saturday, —er—what was I goin' to say?"

"Don't think I can come, gov'nor," said Dick. "I always go to see Mr. Richards on Wednesday."

Mr. Jaggins was loftily indignant. "What!" he exclaimed. "D'you mean to say you would let anything prevent you from comin' to the Grand Concert? . . . for *'Im* too! . . . I'll tell you what, while I think of it, put on your rags" (Mr. Jaggins always referred to poorer people's clothing as rags) "and run round to Mr. Richards' office now,—my compliments . . . will he take, say, half a dozen of 'em? . . . Grand Concert,—Hon. Sec. Me,—don't forget,—my compliments. Look sharp, it's near leaving off time."

Dick put on his coat and cap while Jaggins fussed about looking for some tickets.

"Here y'are," he said, giving them to Dick. "There's seven, one for yourself, y'see. I wish you could sing,—can't you do nothink in that line?"

"Might recite a little, gov'nor," Dick suggested.

"That all! When I was your age, Dicky, me boy, I was up to snuff, as the sayin' goes, artful as a little monkey, sing, dance, do any mortal thing; reciting's no good. I want one or two more good singers, see? That's the reason I mentioned it."

Dick, always anxious to be of service, responded at once. "I think I can get one singer," he said. "I know a girl who can sing lovely,—if you would like her, I'll ask her about it."

Dick had to give a minute account of Margaret before eliciting a grudging approval from Jaggins. "Now run along and see Mr. Richards," he concluded.

On the way to Abraham Street Dick met Margaret, and obtained her eager consent to appear for the first time in public. "Can I dance as well, Dick?" she said.

"I don't think so, Maggie; it's called a Grand Concert; you see, people have to be more particular at those."

"Oh, all right!" Margaret bore her disappointment very cheerfully. "Of course you'll be there to see me, won't you?"

"I'm not sure, unless Mr. Richards's going too."

"Oh, bother old Richards! I shan't sing if you don't go, so there!" said Margaret petulantly, then ran across the road to help Jemima, who was struggling along on the other side weighed down with a large bundle of washing, that she helped her mother to "take in."

Dick proceeded to Abraham Street, and entered the waiting-room.

"Come in," shouted the "Poor Man's Lawyer" from within, and soon Dick was sitting in the arm-chair, telling Mr. Richards about Mr. Jaggins' compliments and the object of his errand. "You come at rather an awkward moment," said Mr. Richards. "I expect Mrs. Angel to come in at any time now."

"I'm very sorry," Dick apologised. "I had to come, as Mr. Jaggins sent me."

"Yes, of course,—well, I'll take the tickets."

"Mrs. Angel's Margaret is going to sing, sir," shyly added Dick.

"Oh indeed,—then I can't possibly refuse to come. I shall quite look forward to this concert."

When Dick had gone, Mr. Richards picked up a letter lying on his desk, and read it, as he had read it four or five times before, with a slight frown.

"Hope to be in London very shortly after you receive this," it ran, "and look forward to seeing you again. I understand you are doing a lot of good in a quiet way down East, and hope to come and see you there."

The letter was addressed to Richard Loverton's chambers in the Temple, was signed Guy Cuthbertson, and bore an Australian stamp.

The face of Mr. Richards was not so cheerful as usual; his frown cut into his forehead and made him look older than at other times.

He was relieved when the bell in the other room tinkled. He put the letter away, then opened the dividing door and invited Mrs. Angel to "Come in."

He motioned her to an arm-chair, then took his seat by the desk. She appeared to be making a strained effort to appear at ease. "Good evening, Mrs. Angel," he said. "You got my note?"

"No, I didn't. Did you send one?" Her tone was abrupt.

"I sent it last night, asking you to come this evening. You should have received it this morning. But, at all events, you are here,—that is the chief thing."

"I was about here," she replied, "and I thought I'd just come in and ask how this compensation business is going on. It's a long time now since I put it in your hands, and if I can't get satisfaction through you, I'll go elsewhere."

He did not answer for a moment, but picked up

a letter from his desk. "Marland and Jellow have sent me this,—they have some nice things to say about Mr. Angel," he said.

"He was very regular at his work," the widow replied. "I kept him up to that mark."

"Yes! They say that they will be glad to give compensation to a duly accredited person—his legal wife."

Mrs. Angel made a greater effort to appear at ease.

"That is to say," he continued, "they insist upon—they say——"

"That I am not his legal wife?" asked the widow sharply.

Mr. Richards felt very awkward, he cast about in his mind for the best form to give his words.

"Yes . . . they have seen the marriage certificate you handed me, but——"

"Well." The atmosphere between them grew tense, the widow was breathing heavily at this unexpected turn of events,—how much did they know? she wondered.

"Marland and Jellow, Mrs. Angel, are very careful business men, some people would call them close-fisted. They go into every detail of a case like yours; before they pay compensation they employ a private detective to search for flaws in the claimant's case. They now say they will be happy to pay compensation to the legal wife of Paul Angel,—but they say you married him knowing that a former husband was living."

The widow's face was white and set. She rose with apparent calmness from her chair, then sat down hurriedly, and said in hysterical tones: "It's

a lie. How can they prove it? Where's the proof? . . . the proof, I say! Liars and rogues the lot of 'em,—where's the proof?" Her voice died away in a disjointed muttering.

Mr. Richards came to her side and endeavoured to console her. "Come! come!" he said. "The battle's not lost yet, Mrs. Angel. You have not yet given them a formal denial,—they will have to prove this statement,—although I fear it will mean litigation to get money out of them now."

"I'll have the law on them!" she flared up suddenly. "If I don't get any compensation, I'll have damages for defamation of character."

"You will forgive me for asking you the question," he said, "but is there any truth in the statement?"

"Pooh!" The widow unexpectedly rose and snapped her fingers in his face. "That much I care for the lot of you, you as well as them. I can do without it, if it comes to that. I've got a situation. But I'll have my rights in the end. They've not heard the last of Jane Angel. You can tell them that from me."

Mr. Richards would have spoken, but she flounced out of the room, slammed the door, and on his door-mat shook her feet free of the dust of his premises, then departed.

CHAPTER XII

“THE ROSES AND RAPTURES OF VICE?”

MRS. ANGEL called in at a public-house on her way back to Dumpton Court, and consumed a portion of spirits that reduced her to tears. She returned to the attic lodging after a time, and sat on the bed reviewing the situation in a hopelessly muddled state of mind.

Miss Poppy Verinder had been working her into a feeling of dissatisfaction with the “Poor Man’s Lawyer”; she had expressed herself as surprised that such a woman as Jenny Angel should allow herself to be played about with in such a manner for such a long time.

Normally the widow allowed events to thrust her into any definite course of action, and mistrusted her own powers of taking the initiative in anything, but lashed daily as she had been by the tongue of her friend Poppy, it is not strange that she finally yielded to the driving force of that powerful weapon, and sought the interview recorded in the previous chapter.

She knew that Marland and Jellow’s accusation was only too true,—she was a bigamist, with no right to the name of Angel, but clung, as all such frail characters do, to hopes that finally prove to be ill-founded. Perhaps they were only trying to get out of payment, and had hit the weak spot in

her claim by accident. And so she sat in her room weaving surmises no more substantial than smoke.

Margaret came home at ten o'clock with some papers in her hands, and was surprised to see her mother there, sitting with her head bowed in her hands, with traces of tears visible on her comely face.

"What's the matter, Mother?" she asked gently.

"Oh, you get to bed, and don't bother me," answered the widow roughly.

Margaret lifted her mother's face and kissed her. "You are worried over something," she said. "Don't worry; it's sure to come all right, whatever it is."

"No, I'm not," Mrs. Angel said in a sulky, complaining tone, her looks belying her words. "I'm not worried about anything. You get to bed. . . . What right have you got to be out till this time of night, I should like to know, racing the streets? Fine thing for a respectable woman's daughter!"

"I always come home at ten, Mother. It's so lonely up here by myself,—I can't sleep if I go to bed too early,—I lie awake, and all sorts of nasty things that I've heard and thought I'd forgotten come creeping into my ears, and then I can't sleep."

"I know all about that," Mrs. Angel said. "Everybody's up against me. What's one poor lonely woman against the whole world. And now my daughter's turned, and is giving me 'er cheek. . . . Get to bed, or I'll flay you alive, you saucy, good-for-nothing thing,—you."

Margaret laid the papers on the table and began to undress, but Mrs. Angel objected. "What are you taking your clothes off for?" she queried.

“Why, to go to bed, of course,” said Margaret.

“Didn’t I say I wanted you to fetch me an errand?” in injured tones.

“No! you said get off to bed.”

“You tell me a lie like that,—I’ll—oh! I don’t know how to keep my hands off you. Get a bottle and go and get me a quartern of gin from the ‘Hawk,’ and just move yourself.”

Margaret dressed and went out on the errand. When she returned her mother was reading the papers she had left, but quickly snatched the bottle from her and poured a portion into an egg-cup. She drank it off as it was, neat, and smacked her lips. “That’s better.” Then she had a little cry to herself. “Oh dear! Oh dear! the upsets I’ve had, but I’m not done for yet,—not seen the last of me yet.” She dried her eyes, and commenced the perusal of Margaret’s papers.

“What’s this for?” she asked. Her voice was getting a little husky, the tone a trifle maudlin.

“Concert I’m going to next week, Mother. That’s the ticket, and that’s a paper with the turns on it. You’ll see my name there; I’m going to sing.”

“Ye-ou!” Mrs. Angel was frankly derisive and contemptuous. “Ye-ou sing!”

“I can dance as well, but they won’t let me dance at the concert. I’d like to sing and dance—on the real stage.”

Mrs. Angel laughed,—an unpleasant, raucous laugh. “You on the stage, I’d like to see you, but you’ll never be like Poppy, although she wasn’t quite so clever as she tries to make out. It paid her better to be a barmaid than an actress. I don’t say much,

but I notice a lot. Are you going to get to bed ? ”

“ All right, Mother, I . . . ”

“ Don’t give me your cheek, or I’ll knock it out of you.”

“ Shall I put the bottle away ? ” asked Margaret, now growing angry at her mother’s mercurial changes and suspecting their origin.

“ Put the bottle away ? ” shrieked the widow. “ What for ? Do you think I’m getting drunk ? Drunk, did you say ? You lie, I’m not drunk,—nobody—nobody ever saw me drunk,—my own daughter say I’m drunk,—take that.” She dealt the girl a severe blow on the face. “ And now get to bed.”

“ I won’t get to bed.” Margaret stamped her foot emphatically in her anger. “ Who are you hitting ? Don’t you hit me again.”

“ There, I didn’t hurt you.” Mrs. Angel became maudlingly sentimental. “ Get to bed, like a good girl, and I’ll come to hear you sing. There, now, I didn’t mean to hurt you,—didn’t mean to hurt my little lamb, did I ? ”

“ You did hurt me,” said Margaret simply. “ Good night.”

She got into bed and turned her face from her mother, and quickly fell asleep.

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Too soon the early chirrup of the birds proclaiming their matins woke Margaret. Her mother was not by her side. Her heart contracted with an unknown fear. The dim silence of the dawn outside contrasted

strangely with the disordered appearance of the room, with its smell of spirits. She got out of bed,—on the table stood the bottle—empty ; and on the floor lay her mother, where she had fallen from her chair, sleeping off her drunken stupor. Margaret gave a great sob which burst with a torrent of tears.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRAND CONCERT

MR. JAGGINS duly stopped the sixpence for the concert ticket from Dick's wages,—a circumstance that was the cause of some trouble with Mr. and Mrs. Sintell,—the aunt and uncle with whom he lived.

Coarse common people they were, who lived in the middle of an amazing network of turnings into which Abraham Street ended,—eager, grasping people so far as money was concerned.

Will Eston shared a bed with Dick. Will was a favourite with the Sintells, and inclined to presume upon the fact, while Richard was firmly, even loudly, kept in his place.

Although the five shillings a week for each boy's maintenance was still being paid by Mr. Fortune, the Sintells expressed great anger when Dick that week offered them sixpence short of his usual wages. He was only allowed threepence of this for spending, and on this occasion deducted his spending money before handing over the rest. He meant to make sure of his own portion.

Mr. Sintell was particularly loud in his wrath. "After me bin slavin' all the week," he said on Sunday afternoon, "you comes 'ere with a tanner short for me to make up to keep you,—aht of my takin's;—upon my sivy it's a-comin' to some-think."

He had been unsuccessful in four or five trades as a youth, then became a carman, and at this time had a stall in the local market-place for the sale of green stuff, such as lettuces and radishes in summer, celery in winter.

"You ought to go to a concert," chimed in Mrs. Sintell. "Less you 'as to do with things like that, the better you'll get on. Up at the church, ain't it?"

"Yes, in the schoolroom I expect," replied Dick. "But please don't bully me about the sixpence.—Go to Mr. Jaggins and tell him what you think."

"None o' your sass now," said Mrs. Sintell threateningly,—“you charity sprat, you, that's what you are,—charity sprat. Ain't I kept you, toiled 'ard—so's your uncle Alf, just to keep you. If it wasn't that your poor mother was me sister, out you'd a gone, in double quick time too,—workhouse kid you'd ha' been. An' this is all the gratitude I get.”

Alfred Sintell usually slept on Sunday afternoons from four till seven. It was now time for him to seek this repose, but the mention of the church kept him back, just as a red flag may detain a tired bull.

"Church you say," he demanded, "what church?"

"Stolave's." His wife volunteered the information in one word.

"Is that where the lanky curate with the red nose comes from? You I'm talking to," he said roughly to Dick.

"I believe you're faintly describing Mr. Brown, who is curate there."

"None o' your sass now," warned Mrs. Sintell.

"Always comes 'ere washin' days," said her

husband, "just when everythink's upside down, in 'e comes every bloomin' Wednesday. Didn't the kiddies catch the measles directly after he'd bin . . . ? and . . . ?"

"And didn't the line break down, and all the washin' had to be done again?" remembered his wife.

"That's right, Mary Anne, it did; and the follerin' Wednesday when he come, wasn't I laid up with gout?"

"Well, you can't 'ardly blame him for that," she replied rather caustically, "you caught that through chasing the Buffalo."

Sintell did not attempt to argue. "Chasing the Buffalo" was a sore point between husband and wife, and referred to his drinking excesses at certain convivial gatherings.

"Anyhow," he said, "the curate always brings trouble, so that's why I told 'im off larst Wednesday. And now this 'ere 'obbledohoy brings 'ome a tanner short of 'is wages,—cos why? 'Cos o' the church,—well, blow the church, say I!"

Then he shuffled off to sleep, grumbling and growling to himself all the way up the stairs until he slammed the bedroom door behind him and thus got in the last word.

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The Poor Man's Lawyer had shut up shop for the night. He usually opened at six in the evening and closed at nine, but on the Wednesday of the concert he had opened and closed earlier in order to be in good time for the affair, which he wished to attend because of his great interest in Margaret and Dick.

He wrote a few letters, then opened his evening paper, and quietly smoked a pipe whilst reading.

He looked up from time to time to a clock on the wall. At half-past seven he put his pipe and paper away, and began to put on his coat. He rang a bell,—it was answered by a woman who, with her husband, lived upstairs rent free in return for slight services.

“I shall not be back again this evening, Mrs. Hawkins,” he said. “If your husband would care to have the evening paper,—he may.”

“Thank you, sir,” the woman replied. “I forgot to tell you before, but a gentleman was ’ere this afternoon asking after you. I ’ardly knew what to tell ’im, so I just asked ’im to call again.”

“Oh, I wish you had told me before.”

“Yes, sir, I’m very sorry, but I’ve ’ad one or two little worries to-day and it slipped my mem’ry like.”

Mr. Richards sat down again in his chair. “What was his name, Mrs. Hawkins—did he say?”

“He left ’is card, sir, ’ere it is.”

He looked at the name it bore—

GUY CUTHBERTSON.

“H’m,—did he say at what time he expected to return?”

“No, sir, but hark! I thought I ’eard a knock. Shall I see, sir?”

“Please.”

Mrs. Hawkins soon returned. “It’s the same gentleman as before. Can he come in, sir? I didn’t let on as you was ’ere, so I can say you’re gone out, sir.”

"That's quite all right,—ask him to come straight in."

Cuthbertson came in. He was a man of medium height and build, with the refined face of an artist and a mass of dark hair prematurely streaked by grey. He held out his hand in a calm way to Richards, who also extended his, but without enthusiasm.

"Glad to see you," he said unemotionally.

"How do you do?" said Cathbertson. "Thought I would look you up. I promised to, you remember, when——"

"Stop! There is no need to remember those times," interrupted Richards. "I am glad to see you, and hope to have a chat with you later on. Unfortunately I have arranged to go to a local concert this evening, and I am afraid the talk will have to be deferred. Shall I go to your hotel, or will you come to my chambers, say Friday next?"

"It's a disappointment," commented Cuthbertson. "I hardly know a soul in London now, I seem to have dropped through the bottom of the world when I went out."

"Well, you certainly went 'down under,'" Richards responded to this allusion to the other's emigration.

"I say," said Cuthbertson, after a little pause in which time he looked round the room,—“is it possible for me to come with you to this concert? I should so like to, if it is at all possible?"

"I'm sorry I didn't think of suggesting it," apologised Richards. "Come by all means if you think you can endure a third-rate concert,—it won't be much better, I expect. Let me give some instrue-

tions to my caretaker." . . . "And now we had better be going. My name is Richards." Cuthbertson repeated the name "Richards" and gave a nod.

Walker Jaggins, Esq., occupied the chair at the concert which was held in the upper schoolroom—a bare, limewashed chamber, fitfully lighted by naked gas-jets, and with a dark wooden ceiling sloping from the white walls to a beam that was shrouded in gloom.

For a September night the weather was bleak and inhospitable. The wind swept round the schoolhouse with vicious intent and blew up the stone stairs and into the room itself whenever the door was opened to admit members of the audience.

Richards and Cuthbertson seated themselves inconspicuously, near the door,—they both wished to see without being very noticeable themselves,—and surveyed with interest the gathered people.

Many of Mr. Richards' clients were present. He explained something of his work to Cuthbertson, identified the people as he detailed their cases, in between the items.

Mr. Jaggins introduced the performers as though each was the final expression of the particular art she had embraced. A dialogue followed the tinkle-tinkle of a mandoline solo. Mr. Jaggins then said a few words about the fund and the good cause,—said the Rev. Lionel Pontifex hoped to look in during the evening and "say a few words" and soon ;—he was in the middle of his speech when the door opened and a chilling blast came into the room with Mrs. Angel, who, catching a passing glimpse of Mr. Richards, affected to be ignorant of his existence,

and walked straight through the row of forms to the front. She was dressed in a quasi-fashionable style—probably purchases from a second-hand dealer in the West End.

“Good heavens!” said Cuthbertson. “Who is she?”

Richards detailed as shortly as possible Mrs. Angel’s case, and explained that his visit to the concert that evening was largely prompted by his interest in her daughter Margaret.

Cuthbertson seemed to be greatly excited. He asked strange questions and replied to remarks at random.

“Where is her daughter?” he asked finally.

“In front somewhere, I expect,” replied Richards. “But I don’t quite understand your interest in this person. On the surface she is certainly very different from these other people, but underneath I think she is just the same.”

“I am sure she is,” Cuthbertson said in an absent-minded manner. “I beg your pardon,—you must think me very strange, I was merely surprised to see such a woman here at all. Will you point her daughter out to me, if you should see her?”

“With pleasure.”

The Reverend Lionel Pontifex entered the hall just then and stopped to greet them, and as a lengthy “Sketch” was in progress, had time for some conversation.

Richards had never before imagined that Pontifex could be so agreeable a man. It was a half-jesting remark about work among the Great Unwashed that revealed the secret of the clergyman’s dislike for his

work. The detached air of aloofness Richards had so often detected, sprang, he found, from distaste to his uncongenial surroundings. Pontifex, he discovered, was a studious, retiring, cultivated gentleman who had been pitchforked by fate into surroundings that tortured his mind and worried his soul. The "Sketch" ended, the clergyman advanced to the front and seated himself at the table with Jaggins, who then rose and announced—"We shall now have a song by Miss Margaret Angel, after which our Vicar will give us a few kind words to cheer us up and send us away with the feelin' in our 'arts that to-night we have helped the good cause."

Now Margaret had been greatly worried about the song she should sing. Poor child, her repertoire consisted only of the songs she heard daily,—coarse, foolish, music-hall songs;—the thought that such were out of place in the "Grand Concert" did not so much as occur to her,—the trouble had been only that of selection.

The barrel-organs to which she so often danced were booming the air of a song which combined in about equal proportions the merely fatuous and the grossly suggestive. Upon this great composition Margaret's final choice descended, so with a little bow to the assembled company, faithfully copied from the music-halls, she began to sing in a voice that was at all events promising :

"When all the little tootsies are a-paddling by the sea
That's the time to see the Johnnies,—that's the time for me,
When I'm jumping, when I'm bumping, in the briny free.
Oh ! that's the time for them, you know,
And that's the time for me."

Pontifex and Jaggins exchanged glances with each other, astonishment in their looks.

“ So sing merrily, hi tiddle-y-hi-tee,
All those Johnnies there to look at me,
Bless the day that I was born,
For I won't go home till dawn
Singing 'Hi tiddly hi-ti tee.”

Richards had given Cuthbertson the hint that the singer was the daughter of Mrs. Angel, in consequence he was following with a certain appearance of painful interest the progress of the song.

Mr. Walker Jaggins rose in as dignified a manner as was possible for him at the end of the chorus and said loudly :

“ Thank you, Miss Angel,—we don't want that sort o' thing 'ere. This is a high-class concert, and when we 'appens to want low-class, sinful tunes, well, we'll ask you to sing it over again. If you can sing anything decent, sing it,—if you can't, then please make way for them as can.”

Margaret's face burned,—she was only dimly conscious that the song in some way had not “ gone down.” She looked appealingly at Dick, then to her mother,—Mrs. Angel was in the front row.

Richards and Cuthbertson could see the whole scene quite well and heard Mrs. Angel say, “ Come down, Maggie ! don't stand there a-gaping at us, come down and don't bemean yourself singing to such riff-raff.”

Evidently Mrs. Angel expected Margaret to follow her out, for she herself swept from the room without further ado.

“ God ! ” Richards was surprised to hear Cuthbertson say. “ Is that poor child her daughter ? ”

CHAPTER XIV

MARGARET GOES AWAY

THE Reverend Lionel Pontifex rose and made a few brief remarks usual to such occasions—the assembly sang “God save the King,” and then divided into groups to discuss the events of the evening, and gradually dispersed.

Margaret had been instantly humbled by Mr. Jaggins’s coarse remonstrance, and had quitted the platform directly he had spoken. Instead, however, of following her mother she remained sitting with Dick until the finish, wondering why there had been any objections,—and after all—who was old Jaggins to dare speak to her like that? “You’re a fine one,” she said to Dick, “to ask any one to sing at your mouldy old concert, and then to let them be treated like this.”

Dick was very serious indeed. “You must not sing such songs, Maggie,” he said. “There are so many nice songs in the world to choose from,—that one was not worthy of you.”

Margaret looked at him reproachfully. “You, too?” she said sadly,—“my mother’s bad enough, but even she stood up for me this time.”

“Then your mother is not your friend in this matter,” he replied gravely.

“Who are you to judge?” Margaret fired up.

"I'm sorry, Margaret, but it's always best to tell the truth at once."

"Oh, no it isn't," she replied. "It all depends whether the truth happens to be nice or nasty. If it's nasty it should be given in little doses. I could stand it then. Besides, how do you know what's the truth in this case?—you are not much older than me, and, besides, I don't really know what the trouble is all about."

Mr. Jaggins came up at this moment and said grimly enough to Dick, "Won't ask you to recommend any singer in the future, my boy. Disgraceful—outrageous——"

As he continued speaking to Dick in this strain, Margaret turned sadly away and walked to the door. Cuthbertson seeing this asked Richards if he would introduce Margaret to him, so, before she had time to depart, the Poor Man's Lawyer greeted her. After a few personal inquiries he turned to Cuthbertson,—
"This gentleman," he said to Margaret, "has been very much interested in this concert, he would like to speak to you, Mr. Cuthbertson,—Margaret Angel."

Margaret looked well at him before putting out her hand. On the whole he created a favourable impression. She saw a thoughtful face, rather careworn, with moustache and pointed beard, eyes well-shaped and winning but without fire in their depths—instead, an expression that seemed to say, "The fires of my life are quenched, sorrow is rooted within me."

Cuthbertson expressed sympathy with her at the treatment she had received at Jaggins's hands and gradually led her on to speak of herself, her home,

mother, friends. Margaret was soon pouring out her heart to the stranger in a way she had never before experienced—he was so sympathetic, understood so perfectly the little unspoken things she wished to imply, that she threw from her the natural reserve of the slum-child, and told him all about herself.

She excused her mother with painful *naïveté* and was greatly touched to observe how keenly he seemed to feel for her, and became almost frightened as she saw his brows knit in anger when she narrated the events of the week before.

Richards, talking with Pontifex, looked at intervals upon them, wondering within himself at this unexpected phase of Cuthbertson's nature,—although, he reflected, he really knew very little of Cuthbertson, and that little had been gained under vastly different circumstances. He turned again to the clergyman who was in a despondent mood, "I know I am a dreadful failure here," Pontifex was confessing, "I should not have come here at all in the first place if Mr. Fortune had not so pressed me to consent to be nominated. He is the patron of the living, and was very anxious I should come here."

"I expect you find the surroundings very depressing," Richards suggested.

"Yes! partly, but the greatest thing I miss is the intellectual stimulus of life. I fear my mind is in danger to becoming atrophied if I stay here much longer,—my whole nature revolts at the people around, their ways, their homes,—their streets are hideous to me. Do you know," he lowered his voice as if almost ashamed of what he was saying, "Do you know I feel as though I could shudder when one

of my parishioners touches me,—dirt, disease, ignorance, are in their touch. Oh, you would pity me if you knew how utterly unfit I am for this life down here.”

The room had become emptied of its former occupants. None but Cuthbertson and Margaret, Pontifex and Richards remained, save Dick Bonnerdale. He now approached, and asked Margaret if he could see her safely home?

“No thank you,” said Margaret. Her face was flushed, she was excited in manner. She turned from Dick abruptly and continued speaking to Cuthbertson, at which Dick, feeling very sore, walked sorrowfully away down the stairs, and made his way to the entrance to Dumpton Court,—anxious only to see his beloved Margaret safe home.

Pontifex broke off suddenly from his confession and looked at his watch. “Nearly half-past ten,” he said. “We must be going, or the caretaker will give notice!”

Margaret hurriedly said good night, and remonstrated with Cuthbertson who, Richards saw, pressed a half-crown into her hand. Then she quickly disappeared from view.

Cuthbertson and Richards passed Dumpton Court on their way from the concert,—Dick Bonnerdale was standing at the entrance patiently waiting, and returned their salute. Cuthbertson and Richards travelled together as far as the “Bank,” then parted,—each to his way. “Thank you very much for an intensely interesting evening,” said Cuthbertson, “I will write about seeing you again.”

Mrs. Angel, sitting in her room waiting for Margaret, expecting every moment to hear that light, dancing step upon the stair,—to see her burst into the room shedding the light of youth and innocence around her, began to feel disappointed.

A cheap clock in a tin case ticked minute after minute into the past, that inexorable past where our deeds are moulded in iron and endure for ever. Mrs. Angel grew uneasy as an hour succeeded the minutes. Somewhere in the distance, a great bell tolled out eleven o'clock. Still Margaret had not returned. She opened the window and looked out upon a night that was majestic—with a menace of wrath. The wind had dropped a little,—over the face of the moon and stars great black clouds were creeping—sable mourners for the dying day.

Mrs. Angel shut the window after a little while, and putting on her cloak and hat went down the stairs and out to look for Margaret.

Dick Bonnerdale was still at the entrance to the court, white with cold, shivering through the thin clothes he wore.

“Has Maggie come home yet, Mrs. Angel?” he queried piteously.

“My goodness! Don't you know where she is? I thought she was out somewhere with you. I was going to give you both such a jacketing as you wouldn't forget for a long day. If she hasn't been with you, then where is she?”

“She was in the schoolroom just before half-past ten,” said Dick. “Let's go and ask the caretaker.”

Together they walked through the now desolate

streets,—to the door in the wall of the church grounds,—Dick pulled the bell.

They heard its distant tinkle reverberate in the forsaken grounds of the church and waited long and patiently for an answer.

No sound was heard in answer to their summons, so again Dick rang the bell, this time a long, insistent peal that echoed through the silent ways with ghostly effect. Again a wait, then a glimmer of light appeared through the chinks in the woodwork—and a gruff voice demanded, “Who’s there?”

“Oh! please Mr. Pilkins, have you seen Maggie Angel?”

“Bother Maggie Angel!” the voice replied irritably. “Is that all you want?”

“Are you quite sure she isn’t here,” asked Mrs. Angel.

“Course I am,—good night.”

They returned the salutation and stood for a moment considering their next step. “I’ll tell you what,” suggested Dick, “let’s go to the police station.” He buttoned his coat to the last hole as he spoke and turned up the collar, for the rain now began to envelop them in a misty cloak. Mrs. Angel looked dubiously at the sky, and said, as she raised her skirt, “No fear, I’m not going to run about on a night like this, I shall catch my death of cold. After all, she knows where she lives, and she’s old enough, I should think, to find her own way about town.”

Dick watched her as she retreated, with mingled feelings of amazement and contempt. So far as he was concerned no trouble would be too great in the search for Margaret,—so she were found.

He hurried to the police station and poured out eagerly a description of her to the sympathetic constable in charge, who promptly telephoned to various stations giving the description received, and asking that any accident cases to girls might be specially reported ; but although he waited for three-quarters of an hour, there was no news of Margaret.

She had indeed disappeared.

Dick at length went home and found his uncle sitting up for him, angry and intoxicated ; he would not listen to a word of explanation, but loudly proclaimed his intention of casting such a ne'er-do-weel as Dick out into the streets to see how he got on there.

As Dick mounted the stairs to go to bed he heard his aunt shrilly declaiming from her room. Unheeding he passed and got to bed, but not to sleep.

Heavy-eyed he rose shortly after, to a day that forbade him Margaret.

CHAPTER XV

THE BLACK SHEEP

DICK spent all the following night searching aimlessly for Margaret, and returned home in the morning to the Sintells'—tired and worn out.

His uncle was packing his barrow with green-stuff for the market-place when Dick turned the corner into the street, and suspended his operations to give voice to his intense disapproval of people who stay out all night.

Mrs. Sintell quickly bustled out of the house to assist her husband in a warm denunciation of Richard and his ways. Dick attempted in a tired, listless way to explain the reasons of his absence, but in vain,—his uncle and aunt refused to believe either that Margaret had disappeared or that, if she had, he would have taken the trouble to stay out all night looking for her.

"Go and tell that to the 'Orse-Marines," derisively advised Sintell. "It won't wash 'ere. You're a Gonoff—you are, Son-of-a-gun—if you don't alter a lot, you'll clear aht of this 'ouse, and quick too."

Will Eston, who now assisted Sintell in a working capacity, came to the door with a basket just in time to hear the concluding words of the indictment. He put his basket on the ground, and looking reproachfully at Dick, said, "It's quite right what uncle says. Besides, you are setting a bad example

to me and the children. Why don't you give up these wicked ways ? ”

“ WHAT wicked ways ? ” said Dick.

“ Well, *you* know,” continued Eston, looking to the Sintells for commendation and support, which were freely forthcoming.

“ Bravo ! young Will,” said Mrs. Sintell. “ That’s right, rub it in ; he’s like ’is father—as wicked as ’e’s high.”

“ Was my father wicked ? ” demanded Dick.

“ I’ll tell you what your father was, young man,” said his aunt. “ He was a convict, and led my poor dear sister to an early grave ; and if you look inside the clock on the parlour mantel-shelf, you’ll see a noospaper cutting that’ll tell you all you want to know about your father,—you young scamp ! ”

Will Eston piously laughed. “ That’s right, Auntie,” he said. “ Tell him off properly ; he’s a wicked scoundrel.”

Dick looked from one to the other defiantly. Though he felt over-tired in body, the spirit in him refused to be physically bound,—the news stung him to the quick. He was already aware that some undesirable cloud hung over the memory of his father, for Mrs. Sintell had always mixed the misdeeds of his father in the potion when she prepared to pour the vials of her wrath over Dick—but, until this moment, in vague and guarded language.

Now the scales were to be torn from his eyes,—a newspaper record in the clock-case was to give him understanding, and burn him with a duplicate of his father’s stigma. Eston’s hypocritical words roused his fighting instincts. “ Can I be responsible

for my father's crime?" He spoke quietly, but within him a red-hot torrent boiled.

"Taint only that, you're getting to be as bad yourself," said Sintell. "Your father lives in you."

"Like father like son, they say," said Eston.

"What sort of father did you happen to have?" inquired Dick.

Eston blushed. He, of course, knew absolutely nothing of his forbears. "Why, better than yours," he ventured. "I don't suppose he was as wicked as yours was."

"Oh! well, his son's turning out a pretty fine blackguard," retorted Dick. "Perhaps you take after your father, or perhaps you're a worse specimen than him."

Eston's eyes contracted in anger. "ME!—a blackguard?" he ejaculated.

Mr. and Mrs. Sintell looked horrified at such an impossible accusation, but Richard heeded them not.

"Yes, you," he said. "You play 'banker' on Sunday,—you and your mates; send Ginger Stodd into the public-house to get half a gallon of beer, you, a boy of fourteen. Yes,—don't interrupt,—to the 'Puritan Arms.' I know,—and you all get nearly drunk, and sleep it off underneath the sacks in Perridew's Stables. And all the time you're supposed to be at Sunday-school and gone home to the teacher's house for tea. You talk to me about being wicked."

In a moment a scrambling and kicking took place. Eston, pale with anger, vainly battled with Richard, while Mr. and Mrs. Sintell roughly pushed Dick away

with many imprecations. "Out of it, you scamp!" they cried angrily. "King of liars, and thief, out of it!"

The boy withdrew a few yards, Mrs. Sintell ran indoors, while her husband, with his arm lovingly round Eston's neck, threatened to pulverise Dick.

"Out of it!" he shouted. "Out of it!" He advanced and gave the boy a running kick.

"'Ere, wait a minute," cried Mrs. Sintell, reappearing from the house. "Wait a minute."

Dick, who was limping away, turned at the sound of her voice. She pressed the newspaper cuttings into his hand. "And don't you come back again," she said.

Towards the office of the Poor Man's Lawyer the boy, dead beat and limping, made his way. He rang the bell. Mrs. Hawkins opened the door.

"My Lord 'a mercy!" she exclaimed, when she saw the deathly pallor of Dick's face,—his dejected, limp appearance was pitiful to behold.

"Is Mr. Richards in?"

"No, he won't be here till to-night. It's only nine o'clock now. Besides, real gentlemen don't get up so early as we do. Whatever 'ave you been doin' of to look like you do?"

"May I come in and sit down?" begged the boy. "I have been out all night looking for Maggie Angel." . . . He made several attempts to finish the sentence, then fell into a senseless heap on the floor. Mrs. Hawkins, a motherly soul without children, rapidly picked him up and carried him into the consulting-room.

She thumped the easy chairs, to make them easier,

then arranged them into an impromptu couch, upon which she laid him.

She went to the street door again, and hailing a boy who was passing with both hands in his pockets, whistling shrilly, petrified him for a moment by a short, sharp summons to "Stop!" and reanimated him by instructions to run at lightning speed for the doctor, promising a penny if he brought him quickly.

The doctor's diagnosis was that Dick was thoroughly run down in general health, and the night's exposure had developed an attack of pleurisy. "Is he a relation of yours?" he asked.

"Oh no. Mr. Richards is very interested in him, that's all, so I'm going to look after the boy till he comes and tells me what to do about it. I've sent him a telegram."

The doctor went away after promising to return as soon as possible, and shortly after the Poor Man's Lawyer arrived.

Mrs. Hawkins gave him a detailed account of the morning's happenings. He was greatly surprised to hear of Margaret's strange disappearance, and at once rang up the police. The short conversation over the 'phone that followed was not very satisfactory,—no news was to hand of the girl,—they would do their best, and let him know at once if anything turned up. Mr. Richards then put himself into communication with a news agency, and asked them to arrange for a report of the girl's disappearance, together with a description, and particulars of a reward to any one who could give such information as might lead to her recovery,—to be inserted in the leading newspapers.

Having done all he could for the time being in this way, he turned to Dick, and saw that he was comfortable, then sent Mrs. Hawkins out at once to buy various dainties and extra good articles of food for the patient, and placed a notice on the panel of the street door to the effect that the office was closed for the day.

By the time he had completed these arrangements the doctor had returned and again scrutinised his patient. "Is there anything I can do for him?" asked Mr. Richards. After detailing his course of action, the doctor suggested removal to a hospital, which was effected two days later.

Dick slowly recovered under skilful and loving treatment. Every day the Poor Man's Lawyer came to see him, bringing a cheerful bustle and creature comforts for his delectation. The boy told him everything that had transpired since the concert, and more than once saw the smile vanish from Mr. Richards' face when he referred to the treatment he had received from the Sintells, and to their expressed opinion of him.

There was no news of Margaret,—day after day, week after week passed away without a sign. Mr. Richards did everything he could think of to find her, but in vain,—the police had made extensive inquiries, but as no reason could be assigned for her departure, were inclined to be gloomily mysterious on the subject. After all, the sad fact exists that a large number of girls disappear every year;—so, perhaps, their attitude was not so very surprising.

While Dick was in hospital the Sintells wrote an alarming report to Augustine Fortune of the un-

speakable crimes the boy was rapidly fitting himself to execute, and painted in equally exaggerated terms the claims for the ultimate canonisation of William Eston.

This letter gave great pleasure to Fortune, who promptly placed it in his record book and sent a copy to Arnold Loverton.

He then decided to pay a visit to Abraham Street and inquire into things for himself. Mrs. Sintell spread out her best company manners upon beholding him, and affected a curious speech containing as many big words as she knew :

“ We didn’t like to expose the kids, beg pardon, kiddies, to the contamination of such as him, and ’e stopped out all night too.”

“ Yes ! that’s a bad sign, eh, Mrs. Sintell ? ”

“ Me a-suffrin’ from ’somnia, too, becos of it, and pore Sintell wore out to the bone ’cos ’e brought ’ome sixpence short last week, the boy did.”

Fortune heard all the details of the black sheep’s goings-on, and asked his present whereabouts.

“ I’m sure—there !—somebody did say he was laid up. It’s the punishment of the Lord, if ’e is, for ’e’s a wicked one. I’ve always bin as good as a mother to ’im and to Willie, yet one turned out so bad, so ’niquitious, and the other so good. I’m sure we’ve earned the money you pay us, over and over again. Surely you won’t stop that yet ? We’ve ’ad all the trouble of his bringing up and his education, as you might say.”

“ Oh, m’well . . . I’ll consider the whole matter. Good-bye.”

Mr. Fortune went straight to the office of the Poor

Man's Lawyer. "I want to see Mr. Richards," he said to Mrs. Hawkins.

"And did you want him very particular, sir?" asked that good lady.

"Yes, I want to see him,—and, by the way, perhaps you may be able to help me,—I also want to know where a boy named Bonnerdale—Dick Bonnerdale—is now."

"There now," said Mrs. Hawkins, "you can kill two birds with one stone, as the sayin' is;—at St. Marmaduke's 'Orspital both of 'em is, this very afternoon, No. 22 bed in 'Charity' Ward."

Fortune hurried away to the hospital, and with a little explanation was allowed to pass the porter's lodge without the customary ticket. The rest was easy, and very soon he reached the "Charity" Ward.

The door was open. Mr. Fortune put his head inside, and presently noticed Mr. Richards sitting by a bedside, talking to the boy, who was sitting up.

He walked up the ward and greeted Mr. Richards with outstretched hand. "How are you, my boy?" he said affectionately to the Poor Man's Lawyer. "You are not looking very well. Now, why is that?"

Mr. Richards returned the salutation with obvious pleasure. "Just a little anxiety my friend here and I share," he replied, indicating the patient. "We have lost a friend,—a girl named Margaret Angel has disappeared. This young man has been turned out of home, and has taken an illness, through searching for her."

"Margaret Angel! Let me see, did not a girl of that name go down to Ponderbridge with one or two others?"

"Yes, it's the same girl." He turned to Dick. "You remember seeing Mr. Fortune at Ponderbridge, I expect?" he said.

"Yes." The patient nodded his head, and respectfully greeted Fortune, who apparently did not notice it.

"H'm!" said Fortune later. "I wanted to see you—alone,—no hurry," he whispered to Mr. Richards. "Fact is, I want to talk about this boy Bonnerdale. I've been to see his relatives, and they gave me a very bad report of him."

"Libellous!" The Poor Man's Lawyer ejaculated the word indignantly. He forgot the boy's presence, and the fact that Fortune had made the statement in a whisper, and gave voice to his disgust at the Sintells' slander of one he knew so well. "I know what they have told you," he continued. "Said the boy was a potential criminal and a blackguard, eh?"

Fortune raised his hand deprecatingly. "Don't excite yourself, Richard, my boy," he enjoined. "Don't worry. Time will prove all things,—both for this boy and yourself. If he is sound at heart, time will give him plenty of chances to prove it, and if he's a thoroughly bad lot,—and really I'm inclined to—well, think he may be,—er—time will prove that too."

Mr. Richards sat for a minute with knitted brows. Fortune seemed to divine his thoughts, for he then said, "It will soon come right, my boy. I must explain my theory to you when you come to my chambers to see me. I explained it to your father in the spring, and he——" His sentence rambled off inconsequently at the mute appeal he saw in the

other's eyes. "Yes, my boy, he's quite well, quite well. Come and see me soon. . . . Why, bless my soul ! our patient has gone to sleep. Good-bye. Come soon."

He made his way to the door, nodding affably to all the nurses he saw, and went back to his flat in Jermyn Street.

"Twysaday," he called out to his man, "make me a cup of tea, will you ? and——"

"Yes, sir."

"Bring me the green-covered book from the dwarf bookcase at the side of the pianola."

"Yes, sir."

The record book was brought to him, he placed it on his knees and turned the pages over, stopping here and there as some item of outstanding interest met his eye. Then he turned to the latest letter from the Sintells and read it carefully through.

The valet came in with the tea and arranged the table for his master's service.

Still Fortune read the letter and pondered. The words he had used that afternoon to Richard Loverton applied just as much to this boy—Richard Bonnerdale—as to Will Eston. "If he's got a sound heart," he repeated to himself, "time will prove it, and perhaps after all this abuse by the Sintells is opinion rather than proof."

He took the letter out of the record book and placed it in a letter file instead, then closed the book with a bang, and with the smile of a man who has done a good afternoon's work, sat down to his tea.

CHAPTER XVI

“THE SCHEME OF THINGS”

DICK crept slowly through the valley of pain and made the journey at the end by way of a convalescent home. Altogether three months had elapsed since his breakdown, and during his convalescence he had read and re-read the newspaper cuttings his aunt had saved for him, but with a different result to that she had anticipated,—there had been a bracing-up and stiffening of his moral fibre.

To a moral weakling such a revelation would have been absolutely overwhelming, but to such as Dick Bonnerdale it comes as a challenge.

“I am myself,” he reasoned, “not a reproduction of my father,—a complete, separate being. I am responsible for myself alone, to God; and as for my father, he has paid the price, so far as this earth is concerned, for his sins.”

Dick poured out his soul in letters to Richard Loverton, and from the replies guessed that he too had a troubled soul to reveal, but friendship between members of different classes is an unequal thing,—for one gives his soul, and the other gives his heart.

So at last Dick is whole again and goes back to Jaggins prepared to take up his work where he left it,—but not the same Dick.

The stolidity has gone, he is taller and thinner, more alert in appearance and mind, the cheek-

bones in his face have emerged, his eyes have lost their dreamy film and have gathered liquid fire instead.

He has gradually become used to a world without Margaret, though not reconciled—that he could never be, for she was the embodiment of his ideals and ambitions; without her they were diffuse and lifeless; with her—gloriously alive and concentrated. He felt just then that he had no interest in striving against circumstances unless he could hope to share the fruit of his endeavours with her. This was the Richard Bonnerdale that confronted Mr. Jaggins one Wednesday morning in the New Year.

“Good morning, guv’nor,” he said.

“Mornin’. Mornin’,” replied Jaggins. “I was wondering if you was ever coming back,—I’ve ’eard you’ve been led away by bad company.”

“Nonsense,” said Dick sharply. “Who told you so?”

“Well! Clifford said so. ’E’s home for the vacation, you know.”

“Clifford don’t know my business,” said Dick. “How’s he getting on?”

“A1.” Mr. Jaggins grew very proud. “My son’s a credit to ’is father,—clever he is too,—won a prize for running at ’is college.”

Mr. Jaggins paused and scrutinised Dick closely for a few moments. “Oh, well,” he said abruptly, “I never allow private morals to interfere with business—it’s a good motto, that is, Dicky my boy I say, as long as a man can do ’is work and earn ’is money, ’is private morals don’t matter to me—during business hours. Dick—I’m going to promote you.”

"On the bench, guv'nor?" inquired Dick.

"Well, yes. That there Dick Brontin 'as bin so very clever lately that I came to the conclusion that he'd better try another master. I gave him time to come to 'eel as it were, but he went off, without notice, mind you, and started in opposition for himself." Jaggins spoke with the air of a man who has exercised unlimited patience with an intractable house-dog. "So I kept the bench open for you. Of course, I've had one or two men in at different times to keep pace with the work, but I was waiting for you all the time. Boy!" He shouted up the stairs leading to the workshop. "Boy!"

"Right you are, guv'nor," answered the boy, who came down the stairs into view. He was an old acquaintance of Dick's, a school-fellow.

"What! Do you know 'im?" exclaimed Jaggins to Dick. "He's not very big, but he's strong considering, and—of course, he don't get the same money as you got."

The boy winked slyly at Dick and ventured to ask Jaggins what he was wanted for.

"Oh yes! Go upstairs and tell the new man to pack up at once, I'll pay 'im 'is wages in the orfice when he's ready for 'em."

Trade was brisk and Jaggins had been one employee short since Brontin's secession; and as decent workmen only go to noted sweating establishments when they have no other alternative, Jaggins had had to try a succession of "unfits" one after another, and found his receipts dwindling and his reputation fading in consequence.

Dick's return had brought these trials to an end,

Jaggins at once cast out the particular “unfit” then at work at a minute’s notice, and told Dick to help another man and learn from him the art and mystery of chair-making. Dick hated the methods of Jaggins, but he was learning to take the world as it is. So he accepted the arrangement and rapidly progressed in the trade.

Mr. Richards, as we may continue to call him, arranged with Mrs. Hawkins that Dick should become her lodger on terms which left everybody concerned perfectly satisfied.

Richards visited Augustine Fortune and had the theory explained to him at great length,—and resisted it with intensity. He was as sure of Bonnerdale’s innate goodness as he was of the existence of God, not by process of proof, but by the certainty of Faith.

Fortune, however, had been to the Sintells’ again in the meantime and had pasted the record in the book irrevocably.

To record in detail all that Dick Bonnerdale did in the two years that elapsed before he again saw Margaret would be a tiresome business to all concerned. The history of his inner adventures is a task that lies well within the intentions of this book.

Those casual words of Richard Loverton about the Driving Force had been growing into a creed. He defined it thus :

“The Driving Force is a seed of moral energy that is sown in youth, and grows as we get older until at last it acquires a dynamic force and drives us forward along the straightest, noblest path through life’s

difficulties and handicaps." The idea that one should be judged not so much by the position one attains as by the difficulties and drawbacks one starts with, also fired his enthusiasm, until at last he became almost too proud of the fact that his father had been a felon,—that he himself had been dragged up in a slum. He reasoned that Life is given to each of us in order to see what sort of a job one made of it.

THAT, he considered, was the answer to the great riddle of the Universe,—the purpose of existence.

The greater the handicap, the greater the glory in overcoming it.

Richard Loverton gave cordial support to these views. His own great wish was that Dick might prove a shining example to other children of the Abraham Street area, to show them that one may surmount the difficulties and drawbacks of birth and breeding to a great degree, if only one takes hold of the Driving Force, and mightily wills to do only that which is pure and right.

To Richard Loverton the love of Christ was the great seed to be sown, but to Dick Bonnerdale the sense of personal pride was the dominant factor.

Dick arrived at a great ambition. Himself the son of worse than nobody, himself looked upon by some as one foredoomed to a dishonourable life, he would set before himself an ideal, he would become the founder of a family—whose reputation for nobility of purpose and performance should be second to none other.

For himself he set a high code to live by. He failed repeatedly we may be sure, but it is something to aim high at all.

Apart from little lapses in the way of personal relationship with other workmen, the three great temptations that help to strangle a man's soul came to him and tried to pull him down,—Drink, Gambling, and the Painted Woman.

He was, as all men in his circumstances must be, a strongly avowed teetotaler. The five other men, young to middle-aged, with whom he worked, worshipped the mystic sign of the double X, and helped the prosperous bookmaker at the street corner, along the gilded path of ease, with daily sixpences and shillings, that were so hard to earn.

Dick was like a thorn in the side of these men, they sought to convert him to Drink upon the plea of conviviality, but Dick was adamant.

One day the elder of them thought of a brilliant plan. He waited for the boy to bring the lunch refreshments—five cans of beer and one can of coffee for Dick, were placed in a row downstairs. “’Ere, sonny,” the man said to the shop-boy, “run and get me a bite of cheese, I’ll take the cans up into the workshop.” He then poured some of the coffee away and put beer into Dick’s can to take its place.

Dick paused once or twice that morning,—his coffee had a strange flavour that was not unpleasing. He had no suspicion of the dastardly trick, but drank it all.

Several mornings this occurred and Dick began to like the taste of the altered coffee—then the awakening came. “’Ere’s health, mates,” said the elder, holding aloft his quart can. “No health in that stuff,” said Dick, “this is good enough for me.”

A general titter ran from man to man at this, which

increased to a roar of laughter when the elder continued thus :

“ What I say is,—when a man likes his drop of beer he ought to say so. I can’t stand those carney chaps who say there’s no ’calth in it and drinks it all the same.”

“ What do you mean ? ” asked Dick defiantly.

“ What do I mean ? Why, I mean buy your own cherries, that’s what I mean,—buy your own beer, you’ve been drinking some of ours for the last week or so.”

Dick smelt his coffee suspiciously,—“ Do you mean that ? ” he asked fiercely.

“ Certainly,” said the elder, with bravado. “ We’ll make a man of you.”

An instant later the remains of the warm coffee and beer were trickling down his face and arms, for Dick had slung them over him, trembling with anger ;—“ Make a man of me, will you ? You devils ! ” he shouted, “ now come on.”

They left him in peace after that ; they feared his strength of mind.

The taste remained. Sometimes, afterwards, when the savour of life seemed to be lacking—say, after a hard day’s work in gloomy, oppressive weather, the bright lights of the “ Hawk ” or the “ Puritan Arms ” seemed to beckon and cajole,—his palate urged him to creep in and let the liquor do its work. But the Driving Force was growing and helped him to keep away from this enemy of the working man.

He placed one bet, and only one. The man had been speaking of a horse for the Derby that was a “ cert,” so Dick looked into the matter, read the

sporting tips and came to the conclusion that they were wrong, the most likely chance belonged to a comparative outsider.

The wages paid by Mr. Jaggins were decidedly the minimum for such work. Dick had come to the conclusion that the man who does useful work in this world is recompensed the least. Money was necessary for his ambitions he considered,—so with many a doubt and a good deal of hesitation he furtively handed a shilling wrapped in a betting slip, to the bookmaker.

As so often happens, the novice won his bet at ten to one,—while the initiated lost as usual. Dick drew his money, his own shilling and ten others. What right had he to it? he began to wonder, what had he done for it? To help him get ten shillings five other men had to lose two each, a third of a day's wages each from five men, merely because he wrote a different name from them on a slip of paper. The Driving Force made him very uneasy. “Well, mates,” he burst out at last in the workshop, “I caught your complaint yesterday and backed the winner.”

“Lucky Dog!” said the elder, “I wish I could say the same. I could just about do with my stakes back.”

“That's what I'm going to do,” said Dick. “No man has a right to money he doesn't earn, so here's my winnings between you,—two shillings each.”

So far as he knew, this little incident had no effect on their lives, but within himself he felt a new strength arise that fed and nourished the Driving Force.

The last of the trio of soul-stranglers—the painted woman—came and tempted him, but by the grace of God, he walked swiftly on and loitered not. So, painfully, and after much stumbling, he got through the years of Margaret's absence, growing stronger every day in all that makes a man.

CHAPTER XVII

A WEDDING BREAKFAST

MR. WILLIAM BRING heard of the strange disappearance of Margaret, but excepting as a subject for conversation with Mrs. Demmy—now his betrothed, took no further interest in the report. For Mrs. Angel he now experienced a feeling of hatred;—in some dim way of reckoning he considered her guilty of spoiling his ideal of becoming a gentleman publican in a quiet retreat.

However, he felt, and rightly, that life has its compensations. To become the husband of Widow Demmy was not a bad substitute for the shattered dream—so they were to be married during the coming Easter Holidays.

Now Mr. Bring was a man who had a very good opinion of his own abilities and, moreover, loved change for its own sake. The near prospect of becoming the husband of the lodging-house "Proprietress" caused him to consider all kinds of schemes for altering the conduct and money-making capacities of her establishment.

He picked up some jargon about business systems, but wisely refrained from airing his suggestions for reform until he should be safely married.

So the days wore on. Weeks came and went without anything happening to mar their sweet felicity. Easter saw Mr. Bring and Mrs. Demmy take each

other for better or for "Wusserer" as Ginger Stodd put it—Bring in a *new* coat of Newmarket cut, and tight, pinching patent leather shoes that creaked abominably. She—in a wonderful lilac-coloured gown of ample dimensions with many tucks and frills,—looked handsome, but rather too large for human nature's daily food.

Susan Doddery as bridesmaid tried to combine her reputation for being a quietly dressed, quietly spoken, respectable person—with a desire to be gay and festive in her attire. So from little nooks and corners of her black attire little patches of coloured silk peeped out shyly as though conscious that they were only allowed to do so as it was a very special occasion.

Ginger Stodd as best man, dressed in Bring's old coat, blundering amiably in everything he undertook to arrange, came in for a good deal of rice when they left the church. One individual in the crowd, a fellow-lodger who had never before been known to have any perception of humour, had brought his rice ready cooked, and this Ginger took away with him on the back of his neck. Altogether it was a happy turn-out,—the wedding was a successful function, and the wedding feast that followed even more so.

Nine persons sat down in the front bedroom that had been cleared for the occasion and furnished as a dining-room. Mr. and Mrs. Bring, Stodd, and Susan Doddery, Perridew of the Stables, a female cousin of the bride, two of the lodgers, and an individual Mr. Bring couldn't recollect having met before—a Mr. Bamfield—whose face worried him. He was a

furtive kind of man who poked his head forward every time two people conversed. He screwed up his eyes into narrow slits at intervals and generally contrived to make himself very disagreeable to Mr. Bring who sat eyeing him with suspicious glances. Mrs. Bring noticed his lowering brow as with secret satisfaction, and smiled. "'Ere, Emmie," whispered her husband, when he felt he could remain silent no longer, "who's that individual over there, a-stickin' 'is nose into everybody's conversation?"

"Later on, dear, later on," said Mrs. Bring mysteriously,—“Have some potted tongue.”

"Potted tongue is it?" inquired Mr. Stodd. "There now! I was just going to ask for some more corned beef!"

"You silly man!" playfully exclaimed his partner, Susan Doddery. "Please pass me the Condiments, will you?"

"The who?"

"The Condiments."

Mr. Stodd looked about him vacantly, then raised the corner of the table-cloth and looked under the table. He shook his head sadly. "Thought so," he said. "I don't think it's quite fresh," then whispered persuasively, "'Ave some potted tongue instead."

"Anybody could see you wasn't sent to Oxford University," interjected the bride. "Here's the pepper-box, Sue, and you'll find the salt in this little basin, now don't mistake it for the sugar in the other."

Mr. Stodd pretended to collapse.

"Worst of studying foreign langwidges," he exclaimed. "You forget your own for a minute or two."

"The salt basin 'as got a little ring o' red flowers round it," explained the bride—"what they call the scarlet Pimple; you know, Sue, name of West-End play."

"Oh no, Emma," corrected Mr. Dodderly. "You mean the scarlet Pimple Nell."

"Yes, that's right (what a 'ead she 'as got, Bill, for remembering things!) and the other's a plain basin. Now, everybody think o' that!" And everybody apparently nodded assent.

They were just thinking of proposing the toasts when the furtive stranger gave a groan and doubled himself up into a position indicating great pain. He rolled his eyes in an alarming manner, and groaned again. Ginger Stodd, most obliging of men, thumped his back with all his might, but the stranger's face became blacker and blacker and more painful to behold.

"Stop it," said Perridew, "I'll bring him to. Give me a glass of whisky, neat."

With trembling hands the bride poured out a tumbler full which Perridew held to the light, and surveyed critically. "Rather too much," he said, and thereupon drank a quarter of it. "Do you 'appen to 'ave a little soda-water about?" he then exclaimed.

"Yes, yes"—a dozen bottles were placed before him by eager hands. "Undo one, quick!" he said, "it's the only chance." Then he held the whisky to the light again,—“Still too much,” he said, and drank half the remainder, then he seized a bottle of soda-water and prepared to dilute the spirit.

The voice of Mr. Bamfield was heard at this

moment struggling for expression, "Quick!" he gasped,—“a little drop, just as it is, no water.”

Mr. Perridew supported the poor man's head and allowed him to sip the whisky slowly, an operation that led to his eventual recovery.

“There!”—Mr. Perridew heaved a sigh of relief, and wiped his forehead. “That's what comes of having presence of mind. Good job I was here, sir, or you might 'ave died.”

Mrs. Bring also expressed her sympathy. “Yes, mam,” said the victim in reply to her,—then turning to Perridew, “I thank you, sir. It was the salt that done it, I kept on saying to myself—Pimple Nell's salt, Plain is Sugar, and I kept on and on, and I'm blest if I didn't say Pimple-Nell's sugar, Pimple-Nell's salt, Pimple-Nell's plain, and so I kept on, until I had some more potted tongue, and I went, and as I thought, put some salt on it, but when I come to taste it, lo! and behold it was sugar,—ugh! and me got a natural taste for sour things. Beggin' your pardon, one and all, and all that, I 'ope I may propose the 'ealth of the 'appy couple that is to-day, and may they live and wax fat, as the Bible says,—I'm takin' a liberty at this moment which I 'ope you'll excuse me, to rise in this way, but me feelin's won't be put down, I say, 'ealth to the happy couple.”

Mr. Bring looked daggers at the speaker. He would have liked to put down Mr. Bamfield's feelings with a firm hand, but he remembered his dignity in time, so he responded to the felicitous speech reported verbatim above, and coupling his wife's gratitude with his own, burst into a flight of oratory that moved Susan Doddery to tears—which Ginger Stodd

tenderly endeavoured to assuage by telling her "not to make sich a fool of 'erself."

Perridew made a speech referring to the love and esteem he had always felt for the happy pair, etc. etc., (here he thumped his breast), and wound up by saying he didn't suppose there was another livery-stable keeper in London who could have supplied such a smart carriage and pair for the money as he had supplied that very day. Admiring murmurs of approval from the feminine portion of his audience was Perridew's reward.

Then Mr. Bring proposed a sing-song, he was getting tired of speeches. "Something classy," he suggested, "I 'eard once some boys and gals coming 'ome from a 'oliday in the country, sing a song about "Where the bee sucks, there bucks I"—somethink like that.—Now that's the sort o' song you ought to learn, Emma."

"Me," the bride coyly shrugged her ample shoulders and smiled vainly—"do you think it would soot my voice?"

Mr. Bamfield selected this moment to rise again to his feet. "Me feelings won't be put down," he said, "I want to propose another toast."

Mr. Bring edged nearer to him. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Me feelin's won't be put down, so I——"

"Oh! won't they? Let's see what this'll do!" And Mr. Bring pushed Mr. Bamfield into the arms of Ginger Stodd.

"It's an outrage," exclaimed the man of feeling. "Mrs. Demmy——"

"Bring, please."

"Mrs. Bring,—do you stand there and see me hinsulted?"

The bride was at once indignant with her husband. "Bill!" she exclaimed, "how dare you strike Mr. Bamfield, our very best friend!"

"Our what? Oh, 'ere, cheese it, Emma—— Him a friend?"

"Yes, he it was who really brought us together."

"Oh I say! Emma, him? with a face like that! We're sure to 'ave seven years bad luck now."

Perridew's voice was heard at this moment above the din.

"Orspitality! Orspitality! Bill," he shouted. "Mustn't bang a man in your own 'ouse you know. Take him outside and bang him, I'll hold your coat."

"No you don't," said the widow excitedly. "No fighting at my wedding. I've never had it before and I won't have it now."

"Quite right," agreed her husband. "We'll settle our little differences quietly if you will kindly clear aht of the room for a little while."

After a time only the newly wedded pair and Bamfield were left in the room.

"Now what did you mean, Emma?" Bill Bring inquired,—“when you said what you did?”

"It was like this, Bill,—this man knows all about that there brazen hussy, Mrs. Angel, as she calls herself, and I 'appened to meet 'im quite accidental shortly after you went mad over her, when you went round to see her one night."

"'Ow do you know I went round there?" demanded her husband.

"Oh! a little bird told me." She meant Ginger Stodd by this subtle reference.

"Oh well! And what about it?"

"Well, I met Mr. Bamfield, and about the first words he used was, 'I just seen a party who I hated years ago.'—So I says, 'Go on, where?' 'Gorn down that court,' he says, 'party with golden 'air,' he says, 'dressed respectable in black.'—So I put one thing with another and I says, 'Mrs. Angel, you mean?' didn't I, Mr. Bamfield?"

"You did, mem," agreed that gentleman. "And I told you the hist'ry of that person, did I not?"

"'E did." And Mrs. Bring again took up the tale. "What 'e said was, well, 'e says he knew 'er when she was a barmaid, and she gave 'im 'opes,—smiled at 'im sometimes,—he was a potman you see."

"Happy dreams and love all around," suggested Bring.

"Ah yes," the furtive stranger sighed,—and continued the story,—“But all of a sudden the scene was changed, a toff came on the scene, a dark chap, and she never smiled at me again. The toff 'e seemed to like 'er, thought she was an angel out o' work and obliged to go into the public line to get 'er livin'. So 'e married 'er 'e did, took a little place for 'er and 'e only see 'er every week, and—famblly matters you see,—had to hide 'is marriage."

"Well, what about it?" impatiently demanded Bring.

"Well, I only got to know about it bit by bit you see, but when I knew it all, I wanted me revenge. So I waited for him outside the 'ouse one night, and when he comes out I said to 'im, 'Beg pardon, sir,

but I got a warning to give you. 'Got a warning to give me,' 'e says puzzled like. 'Yes, sir,' I says, 'I've known your wife a long time now, sir.' 'What's my wife to do with you?' says 'e like that—you know how these 'ere toffs looks at yer, upstart like? 'Nothink to do with me, sir,' says I, 'but she's 'ad a bit to do with Jack Springel. It was the talk of the place at the time, sir,' I says. He looks at me queer like, as if 'e was going to eat me——"

"Good job for 'im 'e didn't," ungraciously commented Bring.

"And 'e stood there a-thinking 'ard, and presently 'e turns round and 'e says, 'You worm!' but I could see 'is mind was upset."

"And I suppose 'e went back and 'ad a row?" Mr. Bring interposed.

"Not 'e," said Bamfield. "'E went straight up the street, and 'e never come back."

"Why not? 'Cos of what you told 'im?"

"Not altogether,—he was pinched by the police."

"He was?"

"He was. Some gang o' thieves 'e got mixed up with,—you know these young toffs,—seeing life and all that. Well, he got arrested with the gang,—he got off as there wasn't no evidence against 'im."

"Well, that's a very funny story," said Mr. Bring, when Bamfield looked round for a drink, this being a sign that he had finished. "And also do you know she lost 'er daughter,—nice little gal named Maggie. Now, is she the toff's daughter, or the Angel bloke's, who she married afterwards?"

"Couldn't say," answered Bamfield, "but, any-

how, if she's like 'er mother she'll be a wrong un, although I loved 'er."

Mr. Bring poured him out a glass of whisky and turned to his wife. "Emma," he said tremulously, "you saved me from that wicked woman." Then he went to the door and called the others in.

"Mister," he said aloud that all might hear, "I apologise for striking yer,—'ere's the right 'and o' fellowship,—a honest 'and though I says it."

Mr. Bamfield warmly shook the outstretched hand, then insisted upon shaking hands with the assembled company. "Me feelings won't be put down," he explained.

CHAPTER XVIII

GUESTS OF FORTUNE

MR. FORTUNE was the owner of a charming property near Tunbridge Wells, a small ancestral estate.

A charming old house was Fortune Dene, set in a perfect bower of roses. Around it were grouped three small pleasaunces—the old English garden, where gillyflowers, stocks, clove-pinks and mignonette, musk, carnations, and lavender, abounded in well-trimmed box-edged borders.

The Italian garden with its pergolas of flowers and lovely lawns,—and the Classical Grove where nymphs and goddesses shone white against cypresses and silver birches by the side of a winding pool.

To a poetic mind, Fortune Dene spelled inspiration ; its owner had not a poetic mind, but delighted to see his guests enraptured with this tiny Eve-less paradise. Fortune usually took up his residence here in May of each year, and invited his guests so that a constant stream of interesting people came and helped him agreeably through the summer.

He had Arnold Loverton and Esther there,—and greatly daring, arranged for Cuthbertson to join them. Although Fortune's expectations of Esther's ultimate worth were not very high, he formed a great attachment to the girl. There was something so entirely fresh, so sincere and unaffected about her, he could not help but be drawn to her.

Even Cuthbertson, apparently the most shy and diffident of men, thawed in her presence and forced himself to say and do nice things for her pleasure, while Fortune monopolised the Vicar's attention upon details of his theory, or a game of chess.

Arnold Loverton was now inclined to give up his idea of becoming an East-End parson, he had so long inquired for an exchange, but in vain, that he felt it as almost a command to stay where he was without more ado ; certain that if his destiny was to lead him to the East-End, the opportunity would come in its appointed time.

Esther was now the life and soul of Arnold Loverton's life. At times he felt his anger with his son evaporating,—but habits are tremendously strong, especially the habit of anger against one's own flesh and blood ; although Esther's steady inspiring influence was weakening his unreason, her calm, pure soul made him feel unworthy while he carried his secret pain. In a way his anger was fed by a certain unacknowledged contrition that he felt within himself. However, he refused to consider the matter ; preferred to let the family skeleton taint and sour his life so long as it remained in the sealed cupboard of his heart ; rather than take the manly course of digging out the remains and viewing them in the light of a later day, calmly and charitably. As a Vicar he was a credit to his cloth,—devoted to God and man ;—would sacrifice himself for another's good without the least thought of recompense either on earth or in heaven. Yet there was this one sin to pluck out—he was an-angered with his only son for an alleged crime.

Fortune had arranged that when the Vicar's and Esther's stay at Fortune Dene came to a close, Richard Loverton should arrive for a holiday; he wished, if possible, to carefully arrange an accidental meeting between the estranged father and son whom he so dearly longed to reconcile.

However, things did not work out properly—the barrister was detained in town a few hours longer than he had anticipated, so his father and Esther in tendering their warmest thanks to their host upon departing, had no idea of his coming or of Fortune's attempt at diplomacy in that direction. Cuthbertson stayed on and formed the link between the parting and the coming guests.

Richard came later on in company with the Honourable Percy Doldrum, and listened with avidity to all that Cuthbertson and Fortune had to say of the Vicar and his adopted child.

"She's such a charming girl," was Cuthbertson's comment. "I understood you were expected to arrive just before they left. You've had a great loss, Loverton."

"I'm so glad you have such a high opinion of her," answered Richard. "Perhaps you know something of Mr. Fortune's Theory and Experiment?"

"Yes, I do," the other replied; "but I think he has made a great mistake in expecting that she could ever turn towards coarseness and crime. She is daintiness itself. Your father adores her."

"I am glad," said Richard simply, "for his sake."

"This Theory," continued Cuthbertson, "may be true enough regarding this boy—what is his name? Oh! yes, Bonnerdale,—but beyond——"

"It is certainly not true of Bonnerdale," Richard interjected. "I am proud to know him, and to consider myself his friend. He is a type that England would do well to have in plenty—a young man who is daring to be himself in spite of his heritage and present environment."

"Then there doesn't seem to be much truth in the theory at all,—does there?"

"What became of that Mrs. Angel?" asked Cuthbertson a little later, with seeming irrelevancy.

"Gone away," replied Richard laconically. "Returned to the bar, I expect."

By this time Mrs. Angel had quite forsaken the neighbourhood of Dumpton Court, and was "living in" with Miss Verinder at the "Golden Dragon,"—a pretentious public-house in the neighbourhood of Baker Street. There she tasted to the full the greater glories of life as she knew them, and if she sometimes shed a tear for the unknown fate of Margaret, her anguish did not cut very deeply, nor leave many traces after Miss Verinder had exclaimed, "There now! thinking of your little girl again, you tender-hearted old dear. Cheer up! there's a customer tapping for you."

The manager was struck by Mrs. Angel's appearance and contrived to make himself very agreeable to her in many ways, so altogether Mrs. Angel—or as she now styled herself "Miss Jennie"—found her quarters highly satisfactory.

CHAPTER XIX

THE NIGHT ALARM

RICHARD LOVERTON, Cuthbertson, and Doldrum had a splendid holiday together. They were of different temperaments which blended perfectly. Fortune was well content to enjoy seeing these young spirits about him,—Loverton fresh and frank, cheerful and considerate for others—Cuthbertson, sensitive, deeply impressionable—inclined to be gently melancholic—Doldrum boisterous, happy-go-lucky, a man whose god was golf, and for whom the world was simply an institution to provide him with all the good things he wanted.

Fortune joined in a foursome once or twice, although not an adept at the game. The steady tramp round the links was more enjoyable to him than the play he so often bungled. The game over, a sharp walk back to Fortune Dene in time to dress for dinner,—then the four men would sit down to table with other guests,—pleasant neighbours who were invited for the evening.

Conversation as light as the breeze from the distant sea flitted from guest to guest, then after dinner, games or music, and more talk until the evening waned and night rounded off another day.

The three guests were standing in the Italian garden one day admiring the views, for the garden lay high and commanded an extensive horizon.

"What old ruin is that?" asked Cuthbertson, pointing to where in the distance the remains of an ancient building gleamed white against the blue sky and darkened green of summer foliage.

"That's Bayham Abbey," said Doldrum. "Old monastery or something of the kind. Had such a jolly time there a month or two ago, I was staying at Robertsbridge, you know, and came back to Bayham for a picnic."

"Indeed, is there any historical charm about the place?" inquired Richard Loverton.

Doldrum's praise of places and people was always and only connected with the personal pleasure he had enjoyed with them. A landscape had no beauty for him save as the scene of a shoot or a picnic. He pursed his lips before replying to Richard's question. "Is there ever any charm in historical objects?" he said.

Fortune joined them in time to hear this. "Why, yes, rather," he said. "Look at that ruined abbey over there, for example."

"We were speaking of that," explained Richard, "before you came."

"Yes, now there is beauty in those ruins, any one could see that with half an eye. Those arched windows are perfect Gothic, we can see it all from this garden, the eye quickly takes in the extent of a ruin. But when we are told it has historical connections, then that lends such a charm and interest that the mind's eye must set to work and reconstruct it as it was before the Reformation,—in this case the Deformation."

Cuthbertson and Doldrum joined in the discussion that followed, and then left together.

Fortune and Richard sat down on a garden seat.

"Have you heard from your father?" asked Fortune.

Richard shook his head. "Why should I?" he replied.

"I think he is repenting of his harshness to you, that is all. Do you know, he was here last month with Esther,—the young girl he has adopted?"

Richard's face had been just a little set, but at these last words he relaxed.

"I am so glad he has some one to care for him," he said quietly,—then added, "What sort is she?"

Fortune hummed and hawed a little before replying. "You know my theory, and you know that she is a protégée of mine in connection with it."

Richard nodded.

"Very well, then, to be quite fair to everybody, I must say she surprises me; I do not expect for one moment that she will remain as she is, but I am bound to say she is very beautiful, and very much like a lady. Of course, your father adores her."

"How old is she now?"

"Nearly eighteen. He says she is the *curé* of the parish much more than he is. Parrott,—you remember Parrott, of course? Parrott absolutely dotes on her. I hear bad news of his wife, by the way."

Richard had a soft spot in his heart for the Parrotts;—such simple, kindly, unaffected souls are not over-plentiful in the world. He filed a mental note to see his old nurse later on if possible.

"What is wrong with her?" he queried rather anxiously. "Do you know?"

"I don't quite know,—your father, who is very anxious about her, thinks it may be cancer. What a fine tender-hearted man your father is!"

"Yes," agreed Richard. "He is a good man in almost every way. It was my misfortune to find the chink in his armour."

"Do you mean the armour of Faith?"

"Yes, Faith is a suit of armour. A man with Faith may work among bad men and deceivers,—yet his very faith in their goodness will protect him from their deceptions. I see more and more, that men try to live up to other people's opinion of them whether good or ill, and they hesitate to show themselves at their worst to anybody who credits them with the best."

"Ah, you are young!" Fortune dismissed the notion and the topic by asking a question on another subject. "What opinion have you of Cuthbertson?"

From their coign of vantage they could see Cuthbertson stalking along moodily alone, without a hat, his hands gripped together tightly behind him, his head bowed as if in deepest thought.

"What do you suppose is occupying his thoughts so tremendously?" asked Fortune.

"I feel I know too little of the man to answer such a question."

"Really! I thought you knew him quite well."

"No, you were mistaken. It is true we were at Oxford together, but he is some years older than I, and we really formed acquaintance with each other in London, afterwards."

"Both sowing wild oats, eh?"

"Well—yes—possibly. Very tame wild oats, sir."

"Never mind, wild oats just the same,—so you thought the sowers should sow in couples, and thereon renewed acquaintance with Cuthbertson."

"It hardly happened like that. I was a young fool and was dazzled by Pomeroy, or Smith as his name really was."

"What a chapter in crime his life provided!" digressed Fortune.

"Ah! and what talents the man had. I think it is very largely due to accident more than to natural bias when a man devotes his talents to base ends. Pomeroy had the makings of a very great man in him, yet an unfortunate boyhood sent him in the wrong direction."

"My experiments will prove you wrong.—And Cuthbertson, of course, was another moth fluttering round this very same candle."

"Yes, our only bond of sympathy is that we each had our wings burned by the same flame."

"I understood that you went up to Oxford together."

"No, I went later, and beyond taking up very much the same attitude in the debates of the Union, and a nodding acquaintance, we really knew but little of each other."

"Well, he seems to be worried about something. Do you think I might ask if I could be of any service to him?"

"I don't see how he could object to being asked."

"Or perhaps you would like to speak to him, as you know him so much better than I do?"

Before Richard could reply again, Cuthbertson returned to them. He appeared to have been in great

mental distress, though now obviously forcing himself to be cheerful, even nonchalant.

"You have not had bad news I trust, Cuthbertson?" inquired Fortune sympathetically.

"No! No! not at all," replied Cuthbertson. "The telegram was—unexpected, that is all."

"I am glad to hear that," said Richard. "We saw you were worried, and Mr. Fortune and I were wondering only a minute ago whether we could be of any use."

Cuthbertson pressed his hands to his brow for a moment. "Thank you," he said, "I must think things over. It is very kind of you to make such an offer."

An awkward pause was broken by Fortune saying,—
"I think I hear the first gong, and still have letters to write."

After dinner the assembled company went into the drawing-room for music. The nearest neighbour of Fortune's—a widower—had brought his three daughters, accomplished and agreeable creatures who played and sang very pleasantly. Fortunately all the men were able to contribute to the programme, so quite an enjoyable evening was brought into being, each song or instrumental solo adding a little to the mounting spirits of youth.

Richard Loverton sang "On the road to Mandalay" with a fine swing in his voice, accompanied with spirit by Pauline Deston, the eldest of the girls. Maud, the youngest, essayed Tosti's "Good-bye" with a contralto not yet quite sure of itself, which hardly did the song justice, yet brought the effect of saddening beauty on her audience,—Cuthbertson

was specially affected. He being asked to sing next, turned over the pages of his music irresolutely, and finally chose Kingsley's song from the *Water Babies* :—

“ When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green ;
“ And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen,
Then hey ! for boot and horse, lad,
And around the world away ;
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog its day.

When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown ;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down ;
Creep home and take your place there—
The spent and maimed among,
God grant you find one place there
You loved when you were young.”

The singer sang the second verse mournfully as if the words were utterances of his own heart.

Richard and Fortune sat near a French window on a settee embowered in palms,—the elder man shook his head at the song. “ Cuthbertson is still sad,” he said. “ I’ll ask Doldrum to give us another of his comic songs to dissipate the gloom.”

Richard was about to reply when a distinct tap at the window checked him.

“ Did you hear that ? ” he said, instead, to Fortune.

“ Hear what ? ”

Again the tap at the window. Fortune sprang to his feet, and peering through the window, saw the form of a man who appeared to his excited fancy to

be forcing an entrance into the room. "Quick!" he cried to Richard, "do you go outside and stop his retreat, while I dash out through the window here,—a tramp, I think."

Richard obeyed his host's injunction and quietly left the room; he passed through the hall and let himself out into the grounds.

The man was standing a little way back from the windows now; Fortune could be seen quite plainly fumbling with the fastened lock.

The window opened unexpectedly. Fortune and Richard flung themselves upon the man and bore him to the ground. Hearing the scuffle, the other guests streamed out of the brilliantly lighted room,—the light poured through the opened window upon the ladies and gentlemen in evening-dress, and the dark recumbent figure in the centre. "Carry him inside and have a good look at him," suggested Doldrum. So Richard Loverton and Cuthbertson picked the man up, and the company filed into the room again.

They laid their burden on the floor and waited for him to recover. "I'm afraid I hit the beggar rather harder than I intended," said Loverton; "but look, he's coming to."

The man rose slowly and looked round him in a bewildered way for a moment or two.

Then reason and memory returned; he stepped forward eagerly and said, "Mr. Richards, I'm so glad I've found you at last."

Richard Loverton recognised the voice at once. "Dick Bonnerdale!" he exclaimed. "By Jove! what brings you here?"

"Bonnerdale!" Fortune repeated. "H'm, what brings him here?—why the spirit of his father, of course."

"Why have you come here?" asked Loverton.

"To tell you Margaret is found."

"Found!" a voice burst out excitedly. "Margaret found! When? Where? Ask him, Loverton!"

All eyes turned to Cuthbertson, who had spoken. "Who found her?" he added.

"She sent a post card," explained Dick. "Here it is, Mr. Rich—er—Loverton." He gave the card as he spoke to Richard Loverton, who read the message—

"DEAR DICK AND MR. RICHARDS,

"I am so tired of being away from you who are so kind. I am coming back as fast as I can.

"With love,

"MARGARET."

—and said, "But where is she? This has no address. Of course, the postmark will give a clue,—'Beechmere'—h'm."

"But we know all that," Cuthbertson broke in. "The question is—where is she now?"

"At Beechmere, of course," said Loverton. "Mr. Fortune, I must leave here early in the morning on this errand, if you will excuse me."

Fortune was looking at Bonnerdale suspiciously. "D'you know," he said, "I don't believe a word he says."

"Why not?"

"Because I believe he only came here to rob me, and this tale was concocted in order to get away if he were caught."

"The man's as straight as a die," testified Richard Loverton. "I'd trust him with my life."

"Why did you try to come in by the window?" Fortune asked of Dick. "Aren't there enough doors?"

"I knocked at the door of the kitchen and a man-servant came out and set the dog on to me, so I waited about and presently slipped into the garden outside here and looked into the room, where I saw Mr. Richards here, then I tapped, and the rest you know better than I do!"

Fortune rather grudgingly accepted this explanation. "You'd better go into the bath-room," he said, "and clean the blood and dirt off your face. Twysaday, show this young man to the bath-room, please."

Twysaday led Dick away. Mr. Deston and his daughters excused themselves and departed, while Doldrum also slipped away.

Fortune, Loverton, and Cuthbertson looked at each other, hardly knowing where to begin the discussion they felt to be imperative. Cuthbertson, especially, seemed ill at ease,—he cleared his throat two or three times, then broke out unexpectedly: "Look here! You both appeared to be greatly surprised when I evinced a great interest in the whereabouts of this girl Margaret."

"Yes, that is so," soothingly replied Loverton. "But really we are all greatly interested, certainly

Fortune and I are no less interested in her whereabouts than you are."

"That can't be," rejoined Cuthbertson emphatically. "I have a father's love and interest in her."

"Are you mad?" bluntly inquired Augustine Fortune, while on Richard Loverton's face surprise and wonderment were visible.

"Listen," said Cuthbertson, "this child is my daughter."

"Nonsense!" Fortune burst forth angrily.

"I will prove it. Years ago when Loverton and I were two young fools I loved to frequent public-houses of the lower order—I thought I was seeing life——" He paused, then continued: "Life!—I loved to stand at the bar and ape the gay Lothario.—Well, at the bar of a common theatre I met a girl, hardly more than a child, who seemed like Purity in Hell,—a white lily in a foul pond. She told me pathetic tales of her struggles for a living—how she loathed her sordid surroundings—how glad she would be to turn her back on the place if she could gain some good man's love. I was young and romantic, so I married her; not in my own name,—my father was a stern, unbending man who had other views. The name I used was Greenaway, I called myself Reginald Guy Cuthbertson Greenaway, I took apartments and there kept my wife. I soon discovered the plaster under the gilt—I was tied for life to a bad-tempered, vain, ignorant woman, if not worse. Instead of raising purity from contamination, I had dragged myself into an alliance with a hollow mask. One day I was told she had been a notorious character before I knew her, so I left her, intending to settle

an annuity upon her, and leave the country. I was arrested before I had arranged the matter;—then the trial occupied all my thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. My father made a dreadful fuss,—Heaven only knows what he would have said if he had known of my *mésalliance*. I was acquitted with Loverton here,—we were both entirely innocent,—and I went to Australia, not knowing of the birth of a daughter——”

“But what happened to Margaret that night?” asked Richard eagerly. “Did you take her away? if so, why? and when? and how?”

“Could I leave her with that woman?” asked Cuthbertson, “to be brought up to follow in her mother’s footsteps,—she,—my own daughter?”

“But she married a man named Angel, you know,” Richard reminded him, “although bigamously; she may prove to be his daughter, not yours.”

“What!” cried Cuthbertson passionately. “Are not my instincts to be trusted? I tell you I know she is flesh of my flesh,—blood of my own is in her veins,—I know it as surely as I know I am I,—and for that reason I got her away.”

“How?” asked Fortune.

Cuthbertson addressed himself to Richard. “You remember the church concert you took me to?”

“Very well indeed.”

“The scene over that suggestive song Margaret sang stirred my soul to its depths. I saw her mother,—my legal wife, God help me! I spoke to her daughter afterwards of the life she was living,—uncared for, untutored, with the streets for her university, and I her father, well-to-do, who could

give her everything she needed,—clothes, education, love. So I revealed myself to her, told her not to go home, but to come on to my hotel afterwards so as not to rouse any suspicions. I wanted her to drop clean out of that life."

"And what did you do with her?"

"That was a difficult problem. It was solved for a time by my confiding in a lady at the hotel, who appeared to be greatly interested in my daughter. This lady looked after her, took her to the shops and bought things, coached her a little in the way and speech of decent society, and recommended the school at Beechmere, to which I sent her." He paused as Dick Bonnerdale knocked and re-entered the room. "Shall I tell this young man?" he asked Loverton.

"Just as you like, but remember he is her sweetheart."

"Impossible!" said Cuthbertson emphatically. "His sweetheart was Margaret Angel, not Margaret Cuthbertson."

Dick hardly understood the allusion, but rejoined, "My sweetheart will always be Margaret Angel."

"Very well," continued Cuthbertson. "She went to Beechmere."

"Where this post-card came from," added Dick.

"Yes, and this afternoon I had this telegram." He handed it to Fortune as he spoke, who adjusted his pince-nez and read:

"Margaret missing last twenty-four hours. Expect escapade only. Will wire later."

Fortune looked up suddenly. "This, then, was the cause of your anxiety?"

"It was. I have not seen much of her since I took her there because I realised that she had roots in quite another soil, but I had hoped that when she left the school I could have gained her love and taken her away—possibly back to Australia."

Loverton looked at his watch and then consulted an A B C. "It is one o'clock now," he said. "There is a train up to Town at 5.30,—then a train from Waterloo to Beechmere at 9.5, just leaving me time to call at chambers on the way. Do you come with us?" he inquired of Cuthbertson.

"No!" was the reply, "I am going now." A few words of apology to his host and he left the room. A few moments later they heard him let himself out by the front door,—the crunching of his feet resounded down the path exaggerated by the stillness of the night.

Fortune shook his head. "Headstrong young man," he said. "And I am very much afraid he is mistaken in thinking she is his daughter."

He called to Twysaday, who quickly appeared. "Give this young man a shake-down for the night," he said. "Have breakfast for two at half-past four, and order the brougham at five sharp."

CHAPTER XX

RICHARD GOES TO PONDERBRIDGE

THE barrister and the chair-maker detrained at Beechmere and learned from the porter that the Girls' School was a mile and a half distant. Loverton hired a fly, which soon deposited them outside a large establishment surrounded by formidable iron railings with a brass plate on the gate bearing the words—"Private School for Young Ladies. Principal, Miss S. Tomkins."

Miss Sarah Tomkins was an elderly lady who received them with formal courtesy and distant respect.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?" she inquired rather stiffly.

"We are anxious about Margaret Angel. I mean, Mr. Cuthbertson is anxious."

"Indeed. Mr. Cuthbertson himself came here early this morning. I can tell you no more than I told him. The girl was a wayward, capricious child, who was disobedient to her teachers—and so backward!" She raised her hands in pious horror, for backwardness was worse than the seven deadly sins to Miss Tomkins. "She went out with some other girls, under the supervision of Miss Mimms," she continued, "to inspect the memorial the city has recently erected to the memory of our late Mayor, Doctor Duncannon."

"In the local cemetery, I presume?"

"Exactly. I thought it would have an educational effect upon their minds: the solemn walk,—no talking was allowed,—the inspiring inscription, the chaste design, the profound thoughts of the Grave, of Life, and Death. Miss Mimms was instructed to read to them the 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard,' by Thomas Gray, in the cemetery by the graveside; everything was done to make it a beautiful and memorable occasion, yet this was the time that Margaret Cuthbertson chose to run away from those who loved her and taught her mind to shoot into the flowers of elegance and gentility, although"—she gave a little cough, as if apologising for being so poetic,—“although the buds were very small and the flowers visible only to the mind's eye.”

"Have you any idea why she left, or where she went?"

"Can any reason be assigned to such an action?" rejoined Miss Tomkins tartly. "Why should she leave except that she was wayward, capricious, backward, and—unsociable."

"Unsociable!—In what way?"

"Unsociable. By that I mean she shunned society. She never cared for any of the other pupils, although several of them are very genteel. There is Captain Pinkport's daughter, for instance; Miss Cuthbertson would not even speak to her, and that was her attitude towards all my pupils."

"Was there not one she cared for?" asked Loverton persistently.

"Indeed," the good lady shook her head with a slight suggestion of disdain, "indeed there was,—the scullery-maid."

“ May I see her ? ”

“ Indeed you can’t. I dismissed her because I do not permit my domestics to be familiar with my pupils.” Her head was jerked in a manner that indicated finality, but Loverton again returned to the charge. “ Could you give me the girl’s address ? ”

“ No ! indeed I couldn’t,” replied the lady, “ I never encourage such girls in any way.”

She rang the bell. “ Is there anything else I can tell you ? ” she inquired.

They were gently but firmly shown to the door by the maid who appeared, and had to confess themselves baffled to know what next to do.

They spent the two following days in the vicinity, making inquiries, following fruitless clues, interviewing persons who recommended them to others, and so on, but without avail. So finally the barrister arranged that agents should wire to him in the event of any discovery, and with his companion left the town for Ponderbridge which was not very far distant, in order that he might visit Mrs. Parrott on her sick bed.

They walked from the station to Parrott’s cottage along the lanes they knew so well. The leaves from the trees were falling—as yet singly—fluttering like ghosts of life and beauty, before they strewed the path before the travellers’ feet.

Loverton hardly spoke along the way ; the happiest and the saddest times of his life had been spent here. He sniffed the air with keen and rare delight,—he felt that each little blossom in the hedge-row was at least the descendant of some wild flower he had loved when a boy. The thoughts that lie too deep for tears profoundly stirred his being.

The tiny steeple of his father's church showed through some trees, like a finger that not only pointed man's way to God, but probed Loverton's heart with the remembrance of his father's harshness.

The little cottage was just the same as of old, except that it seemed to both of them to have shrunk since they saw it last. Honeysuckle grew riotously round the porch, delphiniums and holly-hocks, snap-dragons and stocks provided glorious colour for the gardener's palette,—so soon to fade and die in the chill of approaching autumn.

Richard Loverton pushed open the gate and walked up the little path to the cottage door. He felt himself trembling a little,—he had thought so often of Ponderbridge as a distant, holy place, that his nerves were unstrung now he was actually treading the sacred soil. He knocked with his knuckles upon the door,—a tense moment's delay and the gardener, old Parrott, was looking at him inquiringly.

"You know me, Parrott?" Richard said gently.

Parrott had not recognised the features of the younger man, but the timbre of the Loverton voice was unmistakable. He shook Richard's hands with great vigour. "You're just in time, Master Dick. Thank God you've come. T'woife'll be so happy to see you before she leaves us."

"Is it as bad as that?—Parrott, this young man is Dick Bonnerdale: you will remember him."

Richard entered the house and mounted the stairs to the sick room—he needed no directing. He gently tapped upon the door,—and upon a feeble voice saying "Come in," he entered.

The low-ceilinged room, the distempered walls

hung with crude oleographs, the few old chairs, a small table and the big old-fashioned wooden bedstead with hangings, came to his eye at once, then the recumbent figure of Mrs. Parrott, her hand clasped in that of a beautiful young woman, who slowly rose from a chair at the bedside, detached themselves and occupied his whole attention.

"Who is it, Missie Esther?" asked Mrs. Parrott of the beautiful woman.

He advanced to the bed. "I am Richard Loverton," he said.

The old woman held out her disengaged hand to him so that these three were linked together for a few moments. "I had to come to see you when I heard of your illness."

"I thank the good Lord to have lived to see you again, dearie," the old woman said feebly. "Missie Esther, this gentleman be t' Reverend's son."

They bowed. "I am Esther Garnham, your father's adopted child," the girl explained.

She was the most beautiful creature, Richard thought, that he had ever seen. Not alone in features and physical beauty, there was something divine about her, as though the light that never was on sea or land radiated from that gentle being.

She moved about the room getting things for the sick woman while Richard spoke to Mrs. Parrott about old times.

From the garden the voices of Dick Bonnerdale and the gardener could be heard as they moved about, the one interested in seeing, the other interested in pointing out things to be seen.

"Dearie," Richard heard the old woman say,

"ask Missie Esther to read a little of the Bible to me."

He conveyed the request to Esther, who took the old, big family Bible from a little table and asked Mrs. Parrott which part she wished her to read.

The sweetness of her voice thrilled Richard, who saw, or thought he saw, the glisten of tears in her downcast eyes when the answer came, "Read the Prodigal Son, Missie Esther."

The voices in the garden died away, the soft winds stirred the trees outside—an accompaniment in a minor key—as Esther read the parable.

"Yes," said the old woman when the reading was over, "but God our Father is kinder than my sonnie's father was, and he hasn't any older brother to be jealous."

Esther looked up at Richard,—the unshed tears were really in her eyes,—then she said, "How I wish you were reconciled to each other! I would gladly go away if that could be the result."

"No! No!" cried Richard. "God has His own time. Thank you,—thank you a thousand times for all I know you must have been to him."

He could trust his feelings no longer, so he prepared to leave. "Good-bye, Mrs. Parrott," he said tenderly, leaning over and kissing his old nurse,—
"I hope to come again soon."

"No, dearie"—the old woman clasped his hand tightly,—
"I feel this is our last good-bye. God bless you, my sonnie!"

Richard's face worked with emotion. He held out his hand and said "Good-bye" to Esther Garnham, although he hardly knew how he controlled his

emotions. She clasped his hand—in her touch he felt were sympathy and tenderness—he bent his head over her hand—then he reverently kissed it, and the pent-up feelings within him partly escaped in the fervour of his salutation.

He seized his hat and rushed bolt-haste from the room.

Parrott and Dick Bonnerdale were below. A hurried farewell and the travellers left the cottage behind them.

Richard re-fastened the gate and turned—to find himself face to face with his father, whilst behind him the door of the cottage opened and Esther came out.

Richard looked straight into his father's eyes,—each started back as recognition came to them,—the son slowly raised his hat—and passed quickly along the road to the station, without once looking back.

Had he done so, he would have seen his father's right arm raised, as though pronouncing benediction—his left arm clasped by Esther, who was looking after him with tear-dimmed eyes and a heart full of most gentle pity.

CHAPTER XXI

THE STUPENDOUS COMBINATION OF DRAMATIC ART

IN the two years Margaret had been away Cuthbertson had told her repeatedly that she was his daughter, but she had never fully realised what such a relationship should mean—knew what it meant,—rather than realised it.

He had spoken truly when he said she had her roots in quite another soil ; her heart, at all events, was in the neighbourhood of Dumpton Court, although her mind was being trained “ to shoot into the flowers of elegance and gentility ” under the hands of that skilful horticulturist Miss Sarah Tomkins, at Beechmere.

The dismissal of her only friend, the scullery maid, focussed all Margaret’s discontent. For her father’s sake she had considered herself bound to remain at the school—to learn to be a lady, but the invisible cords were tugging at her heart, and at last pulled her away from the school into the direction of London.

Miss Mimms had taken the girls to see the memorial as Miss Tomkins had informed the two Richards. Waiting her chance during the reading of the elegy, Margaret slipped behind a tombstone and walked out of the cemetery by another gate.

Then she ran as fast as her legs could carry her, on, on, never stopping for breath until the city was left behind her and she was in the country.

She sank exhausted near the wayside. Tired and worn out with spent excitement and exhaustion, she fell asleep.

When she woke she rubbed her eyes and wondered where she was. Darkness was fast overtaking the scenes about her, she was hungry and cold.

There were a few shillings in her purse, enough to keep her going for a week, and as distant lights began to appear one by one, she decided to make for them and get food and warmth and shelter.

At a little general stores Margaret found all the things she needed, had a nice tea, a wash, and arranged for a bed. The shop was kept by a dear old lady whose mind happened to be full of the circus and fair that had arrived in the village.

"It's quite wonderful, dear," she said to Margaret. "Wonderful,—lions and camels and—but there, only the pictures on the walls can do them justice, I get so mixed up,—do go and see everything, my dear, and come back and tell me everything."

So later on Margaret walked to the fair-ground whence issued the shrieking blares of Gavioli organs, the roar of the crowds and the whirl of machinery.

Margaret saw almost everything, until at last she formed part of a large crowd that stood before the platform of "Boggener's Stupendous Combination of Dramatic Art." A tall, thin man with cadaverous features, very weak at the knees and hollow-chested, was extolling the powers of a boxer attired in knickers, socks, and an all-sufficing confidence, of middling height, but with a huge expanse of chest and large biceps, who stood by his side.

"'Ere, ladies and gentlemen," the thin man was

saying—" 'Ere is the marvel of the age. 'Ere is the champion boxer at his weight, the champion wrestler, the finest stone and sword swallower, glass chewer and bottle carrier. 'Ere, ladies and gentlemen, is BLINK M'CODDY—the wonder of the age, also the drama,—The Cave of Blood, now about to commence. Walk up . . . walk up."

Margaret walked up, paid her threepence, and went into the booth to see the show.

Blink M'Coddy contracted his muscles to the admiration of all, then struck some heroic poses, and through the mouth of the thin man trumpeted forth his defiance of everybody in any phase of art.

At last a big strong navvy at the back said he would like to have a go at the champion; so very shortly afterwards Blink and the navvy were getting mixed up.

Blink glared ferociously at his opponent after a short interval, like some noble old lion that has never known fear, then contracted his biceps to make sure they were still there, and was just preparing to pulverise his man . . . when . . . a little thin slip of a woman sprang from nowhere and seized Blink by the ear, saying, "Caught you, have I, me boy? Just you come home and hear what I think of you."

In vain the thin man pleaded, in vain a little woman in a watered black satin dress with little red spangles all over her, came rushing in and offered money—anything to retain Blink's presence, the slip of a woman led the pugilist away triumphantly—his obvious master.

The crowd in the booth hooted and cat-called as they followed the boxer and his wife out into the fair-ground.

Margaret stayed behind and heard the conversation of Mrs. Jupp, the little woman in watered satin, and her brother Bill, the thin-faced man.

"What's to be done now?" asked Bill.

"That's it," said Mrs. Jupp. "Could you do the Living Skeleton at a minute's notice?"

"No," replied Bill decisively—"I'll tell you what we could do with . . ."

"Go on," said Mrs. Jupp. "Say a thousand pounds a year each, or something sensible like that."

"No—talking sense,—what we want is a pretty young girl who can dance and sing all night—— We'd make a star of her."

"Yes," said Mrs. Jupp slowly, "so we might, but where's she coming from?"

Then Margaret stepped into view. "Excuse me," she said, "I couldn't help hearing what you said,—may I offer myself as an artiste?"

Mrs. Jupp looked at Margaret with a strange mixture of inquisitiveness and admiration visible in her face.

"It ain't very often as we sees a young lady like you adoptin' this 'ere kind of life for the benefit of 'er 'ealth."

"I—oh—I want to get to London,—my—my mother is there."

"Do you, my dear?" said the little old lady. "Well, we're going to London—slowly, mind you. We go about the country for a few months, and at Christmas we goes to the World's Fair in London. Would you like to stop along of us, until you gets there, and learn to act and sing and dance?"

"It would be lovely," said Margaret impulsively.

"Come now, mind I don't say the governor'll have you, but I'll speak up for you and see what I can do. . . . I don't know, but I think he 'appens to want a young woman your age,—'e's so strict you'd never believe, and careful who 'e 'as, I believe you!" She shook her head, causing thereby all the little pieces of tinsel to flare into vision. "I'll speak for you, my dear, don't you worry."

Then Margaret went back to the little old lady in the shop and kissed her good-bye, then joined Mrs. Jupp in her living-waggon. That lady was busying herself with a tiny stove in the corner of the caravan, and invited Margaret to share tea with her.

"We're a-going on all night to-night so as to give a show at the next town to-morrow,—see, my dear? The men'll get a snack at the 'Farmer's Boy' along here and then go straight on, and we can get forty winks while they're doing it."

When Margaret woke she found herself on a bed in a little room with a window at each side that rattled, and a floor that bumped and creaked alarmingly.

She looked through one of the windows. Outside, the trees moved past, now and then a telegraph pole went slowly by: still the bump, bump beneath her and the rattling of the windows.

"Where am I?" she asked, sitting up and rubbing her eyes.

"You're in a carry-wan, my dear," said a voice, and looking up she saw the little old woman sitting near her, dressed in the black satin with the red spangles that glittered and sparkled with her every movement.

"How lovely!" said Margaret, "to be in a real caravan. Are you a gypsy?"

"No, my dear, this is Boggenger's Stupendous Combination of Dramatic and Musical Art."

"Of course! I remember now, how lovely!"

At length the show arrived at Rippleton, the men pitched the tents and fixed up the show amid a great commotion of coming and going,—then mysteriously disappeared.

Who the little old woman could be, Margaret could not ascertain. She was treated with the greatest respect. The answer to most of her commands was—"Right you are, missus."—Even the driver of her caravan—her brother, as she had called him, yielded, when they differed a little on some point of tent-pegging. "Have you spoken to Mr. Boggenger about me?" asked Margaret of her when they were again together.

"Yes, my dear,—he was that stern and was going to make a fuss,—but I smoothed him down, I said I knew you wouldn't mind—that it wasn't so much a matter o' wages, as a matter o' seeing life, and—er—getting back to London. Was I right in speakin' like that for you, my dear?"

"Quite, quite right. —And what did he say then?"

"Well, he said that if it was anybody else he'd turn 'em out of his show, but as it was me a-speaking up for you,—well, there you are. Now are you ready for to-night?"

"To-night?" repeated Margaret, with great surprise.

"Yes, we do a play called 'The Haunted Soldier, or the Cave of Blood.' Soldier comes back from war,

meets his mother, says a speech about a dream he's had,—then in comes young sweetheart, that's you,—see? He salutes her, and clasps her to his arms, then the goblins appear on the roof,—the girl—you, faints,—soldier paces up and down, goblin laughs, says a curse is on him,—soldier looks at him, draws his sword and kills the goblin.

"The girl comes to herself again, he clasps her to his breast, and down comes the curtain. It's all simple and pretty, isn't it?"

"Very," replied Margaret. "But what must I say?"

"There now! Don't you ever let the governor hear you speak like that. Don't you know actresses allus speaks out of their hearts, you only put yourself in the heroine's place—fancy you're her, in the manner of speaking, and it all comes natural. But don't worry, you'll fall into the way of it."

"Shall I be wanted to sing or dance?" asked Margaret.

"Why, can you sing?"

"Yes, a little."

"To music?"

Margaret assured the unbelieving old woman that not only could she sing to music, she could also play the piano to music. One at least of the accomplishments taught by Miss Tomkins' school had been valued by the "backward" pupil.

The old woman gave rapid orders to her brother to fetch a portable harmonium, then had it placed in a suitable position and invited the girl to exhibit her talent on the instrument.

Deep within Margaret was the stage-struck am-

bition that affects so many young people of fair conceit. She desired applause, thought that to dance one's way through life was heavenly. She sang a simple little song that was most effective in its way, accompanying herself on the noisy harmonium. Brother Bill clapped his hands and cried "Bravo!" while the old lady nodded approval. "That's all right, my dear," she said—"Now let's see what you can do in the way of dancing."

"Will you play the harmonium?"

"Yes.—Now then—go."

Margaret was not professionally exact in her dances, but very pleasing, and her own enjoyment was so real and apparent that the infectious spirit of movement spread to the two onlookers. Brother Bill moved round as on a pivot, while his sister swung her head to and fro in unison, her fingers coaxing discords from the instrument. Brother Bill winked a great deal at his sister in a way that said very plainly, "Eh? What do you think of my advice now?"

The old lady was very pleased with her "find." She told Margaret of her intention to teach her the little tricks of the stage, actions to songs, etc. And promised to let her sing and dance as well as act in the evening's performance—a great mark of favour!

The thrilling drama described by the old lady was enacted that evening and seemed to suit the tastes of a small but more select audience than had usually gathered for the redoubtable Blink M'Coddy. When the play was over the old lady hobbled to the front of the little stage and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen——"

"Hear! Hear!" as usual from the roughest looking of the crowd—"I have great pleasure in introducing you to 'La Margherita'—the marvellous dancer with the nightingale voice, who has consented to appear to-night as a special favour." She beckoned to Margaret, who stepped to her side—"La Margherita," she announced, with a little old-fashioned curtsy, and then retired, leaving Margaret dreadfully alone, feeling very nervous. But her cockney assurance coming to her aid she sang the same song the old lady had heard, and sang it well.

The poor harmonium was set groaning for all it was worth—the old lady played it in the wings.

A murmur of approval arose when Margaret finished. Then she danced, a simple, graceful, straightforward dance, such as no "La" anything would have condescended to perform, and when she had ended felt so awkward she could only bow hastily and rush off, then the harmonium gave a dying gasp, the audience clapped vigorously, outside people were bidden to "walk up" and inside people to "hurry up, please." Thus Margaret's first professional appearance came to a close.

Four times that night the same programme was presented. Margaret found herself very tired when she retired to rest in the little caravan, but greatly pleased with the way things were working.

Days, weeks, slipped by, from town to town Boggenger's Great Show travelled with the "Cave of Blood" and "La Margherita."

The little old woman, Mrs. Jupp, was very kind to her, but recoiled as if horror-struck when the girl one day suggested payment for her services.

“My lawd-a-mercy!” she exclaimed. “And me a-training you for nothing! And Mr. Boggener that strict! Why, he’d turn you out, and perhaps me, if I so much as mentioned it to him.”

Margaret said no more to her, but decided to find out this mysterious Mr. Boggener, whom she had never seen, and ask for payment on her own account.

So one Sunday afternoon, when the caravans were lumbering lazily along the country road that skirts Barossa Common in Hampshire, she managed to slip away from the eagle eye of Mrs. Jupp.

Herself ostensibly reading the Sunday newspaper, she watched the old lady fall into a gentle doze. Then Margaret took her courage in both hands and, as noiselessly as possible, opened the door and slipped out of the house on wheels.

Two young soldiers passing by greeted her with a friendly but restrained “chyike,” as she and they would have termed it. Still, Mrs. Jupp slept on. Three caravans and two carts made up this caravan-serai. Margaret had no desire to speak to the other artistes,—she had decided that Carroty Dick or Swivel-eye Joe, drivers of the carts and general property men would be certain to tell her how to meet Mr. Boggener the formidable.

Carroty Dick gallantly winked his right eye when he beheld Margaret evidently wishful to speak to him. “Not now, dear,” he said, “I’ll meet you in the moonlight, love.”

She gave him a stony look in reply that slightly wounded his *amour-propre*. So he puffed fiercely at his cheap cigarette and quoth loftily, “I’ll tell the missus of your a-gallivantin’ about on Sunday after-

noon. She don't like that sort o' thing,—never does it herself."

She waited for the cart in the rear to reach her. To her great relief Swivel-eye Joe was leading his horse on foot,—“Hullo!” said he. “What are you a-doing of, eh?”

“I—well—I want you to be so good as to give me some advice.”

“What, me!” exclaimed Joe. “’Ere, ’old ’ard, steady on.”

“I am very sorry to trouble you,” continued Margaret, with an apprehensive look towards the lumbering caravans, winding their ways along the white dusty road.

“Don’t mention it, it’s a pleasure,” mimicked Joe.

“Now, if you’re going to speak like that I won’t ask you anything.”

Joe at once became contrite. “Right O,” he said. “Fire away, and if I can I will, but if I can’t,—well, how can I?”

“Your name is Joe, isn’t it?”

“Yes, miss, Joseph Percy Higginson.”

“Well, Joe, I want you to tell me how I can get to see Mr. Boggener.”

Joe’s face for a moment was a study. His mouth opened wide, his eyes became dilated,—he dropped his whip. Then he put his hands on his hips and laughed uproariously, laughed till the tears came into his eyes;—until his face would have challenged a tomato for richness of colour. “Don’t,” he implored, when at last he found enough breath to speak,—“Don’t make me laugh like that again.”

“Now really”—Margaret’s seriousness was be-

coming evident to Joe,—“Now really, Mr. Higginson, I have no intention of trying to be funny, I should be greatly obliged to you if you would help me.”

Joe's hilarity evaporated through his features in the form of a diminishing grin. He put on a knowing look. “Who engaged ‘La Margherita’?” he asked, lifting his eyebrows and putting his head a little to one side. “Eh?”

“Why, no one, at least not directly,—Mr. Boggener told Mrs. Jupp——”

“What!” ejaculated Joe, “she told you that—well I'm blown!”

“I don't quite follow.”

“Who pays you your wages?” he added. “Eh?”

“That's just what I want to know about. Mrs. Jupp says Mr. Boggener won't pay me any wages.”

“Garn! She's a wunner she is,—now ain't she?”

“It seems so—but I do wish you would hurry up and tell me.”

Joe looked preternaturally solemn and as much like an owl as a man could look.

“Miss ‘La Margherita,’” he said, “yer bin deceived. There ain't no Mr. Boggener—Mrs. Jupp's him. It's only a name, see? She's been trying to shyce yer.”

“O—oh.” Margaret took it in very slowly,—then, “Thank you, very much,” said she, and ran up the road towards the lumbering caravan where Mrs. Jupp still slept, at peace with all the world.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CURTAIN FALLS ON "LA MARGHERITA"

MARGARET did not tax Mrs. Jupp with deceit until the next day, after the show had been pitched and the performances almost ready to commence.

"Look 'ere, my dear," said the old lady, "I think you ought to practise another dance,—two hops to the left, two twists,—I'll tell you as you go along—now—I'll play the harmonium for you."

Margaret, who was dressed for "The Cave of Blood" drama, danced a little and then stopped abruptly.

"Go on," said Mrs. Jupp, "what are you stopping for?"

"I'm going on strike."

"What!" The old lady's astonishment was extreme,—*"Go on strike! and me always been so kind!—now go on, there's a good girl and I'll speak to Mr. Boggener about you."*

"I won't go on," said Margaret decisively. "You are Mr. Boggener."

Mrs. Jupp raised her hands above her head plaintively to heaven and murmured, "Well, I never did hear such a thing, never in all my born days."

"Do you deny it?" asked Margaret pertinently.

"Me Mr. Boggener!—how can I be a man?"

"I don't know how or why," the girl replied. "All I know is that you have taken the name of Boggener."

“ Oh well—oh well,” said the old lady faintly, “ perhaps you’re right.—Who told you ? ”

“ I’m sure to tell you—I should say so ! ”

Mrs. Jupp rocked herself from side to side and tried to wheedle away the consequence of Margaret’s discovery.

“ I’m only a poor old woman, my dear,” she said. “ And a show like this is nothing without a man behind it, so I kept the name with the business. No harm in that I hope.”

“ There is harm in it,” retorted Margaret, “ if you use that name to deceive people and get them to work for nothing.”

“ I was just going to give you two shillings a week,” Mrs. Jupp continued. “ Let me see if I’ve got a sixpence in my purse for you to go on with.”

She fumbled about in her purse and at length produced a coin. “ A threepenny bit,” she said, “ it’s all I’ve got now,—but it’s a lucky one with a hole in it, worth much more than an ordinary sixpence.”

“ I’ll go through the performance to-day,” said Margaret, “ because I like it, but I’ll leave you to-morrow morning.”

“ You’ll do what ? ”—the old lady’s eyes flashed threateningly. “ Leave me will you—we’ll see about that—can’t part with my dear ‘ La Margherita.’ ”

Margaret went through her performance that night and managed to tell Swivel-eye Joe the result of her discussion with the missus, and of her intention to leave the show the next morning.

Very, very tired that night the girl went into the caravan to bed, and soon fell fast asleep, dreaming of Dick Bonnerdale and her mother, of Dumpton Court and Abraham Street.

In the morning she got up and sat upon the edge of her little bed, and wondered at Mrs. Jupp's absence.

She looked round for her clothes. On the locker at her side was her betinselled outfit,—but her ordinary garments were missing. She was obliged to dress herself as she usually did for the performance, before going in search of Mrs. Jupp.

She met Joe first of all.

"Hi! hold hard," he said, "we ain't giving an early morning show to-day before the skylarks is out of bed. What are you carimandering round the place in these 'ere togs for, eh?"

"I'm looking for Mrs. Boggener-Jupp," said Margaret. "I want to know what she has done with my proper clothes,—you know, the grey costume and the black hat with the white feather, I wear."

"Lor lumme," said Swivel-eye Joe, as if stricken in a heap,—*"Ain't she a wunner! She woke me up early this morning, it's early enough now so far as that goes, and makes me drag a box out of the waggon,—and arterwards I had to pack it away back again."*

"My clothes are in there," said Margaret prophetically.

"Ain't she a wunner!" repeated Joe. "Tell you what! Say nothing about it to any one,—go on with your show as if nothing was the matter, and I'll see what I can do, and let you know later on."

Margaret was studiously polite to Mrs. Jupp for the remainder of the day—so much so that the old lady was constrained to say:

"I'm glad you've thought better of what you said yesterday. Did you miss your clothes?"

"Yes. What did you do with them?"

"ME ! Who said it was me who took them ? "

"Oh, don't play with me," said Margaret hotly. "Treat me fairly and I'll be fair to you, but if you are in for tricks—then I'll play a few."

"Don't be so hasty, girl," was the reply, "we'll have a little agreement for so many years signed first, then we'll get along like two dear little doves."

Margaret was preparing to go on the stage to do her "La Margherita" performance when Swivel-eye Joe surreptitiously handed her an ill-scrawled note.

She read it hastily—"Togs behind forage in my waggon," it ran.

Her dance seemed to her to last for hours that night, but at last it came to an end. Never before had the audience been quite so enthusiastic,—she had to go back and give an encore before they would cease their acclamation.

She was in a fever of excitement when at last she slipped away to where the waggons were situated. The voice of Joe rose from somewhere in the dark, giving directions for finding the "togs," which Margaret slipped on hurriedly, fearing lest at any moment somebody would come to detain her.

"Got 'em on at last, miss ? " inquired Joe.

"Yes, thank you very much."

"Well, don't hang about talking,—just you cut across there to the railway station and catch first train to London. Got any money ?—No.—Well, I thought not,—here's three bob of mine."

"Very well," said Margaret, "I will take your money, Joe,—but it's borrowed only."

"Oh, no it ain't," said Joe gruffly—"it's a little present—you see—I—well—I've rather took a fancy

to you. Now you there," he shouted with a rapid change of voice—"just 'op it! 'op the twig, d'ye 'car?"

A minute later he saw Margaret running towards the station at full speed. He shook his head sadly,—gave a tender little sigh—and thus Swivel-eye Joe's romance died just as soon as it was born.

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Margaret's feelings were strangely mixed within her when she stood in Abraham Street again after being absent for so long a time. The old landmarks endeared by the memories of childhood came to her eyes with all the affectionate familiarity that absence accentuates.

Yet the squalor of it all seemed more pronounced,—the place reeked with evil odours; garbage, material and vocal, offended the senses,—the ugly, dirty, brick houses with doors opening straight on to the pavement, doors innocent of paint—the shutters of the windows hanging awry on rust-eaten hinges, all thrust themselves on Margaret's vision as they had never before obtruded.

The street has not changed—the difference is in Margaret.

She shuddered involuntarily, then made her way to the office of the "Poor Man's Lawyer" and rang the bell.

Mrs. Hawkins opened the door.

"Well," she began, "what can I—— Well, I'm blest! is it really Maggie Angel?"

"Yes, I am Margaret Angel. Is Mr. Richards in, please?"

“ No, he’s not, and he’s gone home, but come in, come in and tell me where you’ve been all this long time.”

“ I’ve been away,” was Margaret’s cautious answer. “ I think I had better see Mr. Richards before I tell about it, Mrs. Hawkins. Does Dick Bonnerdale still live round Sintell’s ? ”

“ I should think not ! ” opined Mrs. Hawkins decisively, “ when he can live in a place like this.”

“ You don’t mean to say he lives here, do you ? ”

“ That I do. When you went away so suddint he stopped out all night looking for you, and they turned him out because of that.”

“ Was he greatly worried about my going away ? ” asked Margaret anxiously. She had not fully realised before this, what such a step might mean to others.

“ Was he ? I should just think he was, so was Mr. Richards, too. Young Dick was laid up in ’orspital over it.”

“ Was he ? ”

“ He was, and he’s one of the best fellows that ever did breathe, that he is.”

“ I know, I know,” broke out Margaret. “ Is he at home ? Can I see him ? ”

“ No—not yet—he’s working late to-night—till ten, I think, but won’t you come in and wait ? ”

“ No thank you,” replied Margaret. “ I feel a little excited, I really couldn’t sit down—I must go and meet Dick,—does he still work for Jaggins ? ”

“ Yes—he comes along Puritan Row—that way.—You’ll come back with him won’t you ? ”

Margaret promised readily and walked away in the direction of “ Providence Works.” As she went past

the lodging-house near Perridew's Stables she was startled to hear the crash of broken glass, then a minute later a man whom she with difficulty recognised as sadly altered Bill Bring, came rushing out of the house, closely followed by a stout dark-eyed lady, his wife, who was brandishing a formidable copper stick.

An eager crowd collected with marvellous rapidity around the combatants, who were quickly separated by friends.

Margaret had no particular desire to linger here, although her early up-bringing might have given her a bias in that respect, but the crowd was too thick for her to get away.

"Look at my window," shouted Mrs. Bring over the heads of the crowd to her husband. "Selling cat's meat, mind you, in my front room! Call yourself a business man!"

"Nar cheer up, missus"—Ginger Stodd endeavoured to console her,—"Nar cheer up, do——"

"Cheer up? with my lodgers all leavin' because of the smell o' cats' meat in the best bedroom!" She hurled more invective at her husband over the heads of the crowd.—"Look at it! Business man he calls himself! First 'e introduces the tuppenny lean in the kitchen——"

"Don't blow the gaff," enjoined Ginger Stodd.

"Answer me—Was there a tuppenny lean in my kitchen before I married him?"

"Course not," said Ginger indignantly.

"Well, ain't he lowered the respectability of my little hotel by introducing the lean and the cat's meat?"

"Well"—Ginger endeavoured to be diplomatic,

“ it certainly ain’t so class now as it used to be, but look ’ere, missus, get inside nar,—’ere’s Mr. Perridew comin’ to see what’s up,—much better get indoors and settle the argiment.”

Perridew’s arrival seemed to smooth matters out, he simply pushed the crowd back and told Mr. Bring he ought to be ashamed of himself for not appreciating a good wife now he had got one, begged Mrs. Bring to forgive her husband—which she said she “ would think over,” then pushed them both into the house, sent Ginger Stodd for some beer, and thus triumphantly fulfilled the rôle of peacemaker.

Margaret was turning away from this little melodrama when she felt her arm gently touched from behind. She turned instantly,—and found herself confronting Dick.

Without hesitation she embraced and kissed him, thereby causing a tremendous sensation in the small crowd of people that remained.

She was smartly dressed and for that reason alone would have attracted attention in that dreary region. To the members of the crowd she was a legitimate object of curiosity, especially as most of them knew Dick—by sight at least. The smaller Sintells were there and the little Higgses, all drawn by a common passion for seeing “ what’s up.” They compared notes and opinions in eager little knots regarding this extraordinary behaviour. After much consideration they identified Margaret and rushed headlong into the local courts and alleys to proclaim the news of her return.

“ Well, Dick, and how have you been getting along all this time ? ” asked Margaret.

"Very slowly," replied Dick. "Not much sparkle in life for me with you away, but—tell me about yourself."

They began to walk towards Abraham Street, then Dick thought of something. "When did you last have anything to eat?" he inquired anxiously.

"At tea-time to-day," Margaret confessed. "I'm beginning to feel rather hungry."

"Four o'clock!" repeated Dick, "and now it's half-past ten! Good gracious! Let's walk as far as the High Street and have supper at G——s'. Now not another word until you've had some food."

They sat down to a repast of stewed eels and mashed potatoes at G——s', a small establishment which was the nearest approach to a restaurant that the neighbourhood provided.

Dick looked anxiously at Margaret as she sat before him, noticing the little changes in her looks and habits and manners. She was, of course, taller, she was fuller in appearance, her hair was darker, and she was prettier than before.

He could not fail to notice momentary indecisions in speaking to him—a frail barrier of reserve that the new Margaret sought to erect, but the old Margaret swept away. She was frank, yet mysterious, ingenuous, yet reserved.

Dick was puzzled at this incipient change in the one he knew so well; and a little hurt, for how could he realise that she was changing from a girl to a woman, that physical changes react on temperament and spirit.

He would not let her speak of her adventures. Just as soon as they were ready he took Margaret

back to Mrs. Hawkins' in Abraham Street. "I can't say, dear," he whispered on the way, "how very glad I am to see you again. We came to Beechmere expecting to see you."

"You came to Beechmere!" Her voice expressed acute surprise. "When?"

"As soon as I saw the post-card you sent I went to Mr. Richards at Tunbridge Wells and showed it to him. We came on at once—but the bird had flown."

"Yes! Just like a cage there,—wasn't it? Dick, I was very unhappy there—I only stayed for so long for my father's sake. You don't look very surprised, Dick," she added, a little imperiously.

"I know about Mr. Cuthbertson," replied Dick slowly, "but you are Margaret Angel, not Cuthbertson, to me."

That was a happy reunion. Dick went out and sent a telegram to Mr. Richards, conveying the good news, then they all sat round the big table in Mrs. Hawkins' best room.

Margaret told her story of the escape from Beechmere and of the Great Dramatic company she had fallen in with. She told of her conversation with Swivel-eye Joe, and of how she had gone back and taxed Mrs. Jupp with deceit. How at first the old woman had tried to wheedle Margaret with petty excuses, and how she had said, "You know, my dear, a show's nothing without a man behind it, and when my husband died I simply 'ad to find a new name for the show, and so I kept up Mr. Boggener."

"Yes, that may be," Margaret told how she had replied with her usual directness of speech, "but why tell me a lot of lies and make out you would

do this for me if you could, when all the time you are the person who won't do it ? ”

She told that then the old lady had become abusive, had threatened to take her back to Beechmere and leave her there. Finding such threats useless, she had waited until Margaret fell asleep that night and had then taken her clothes away, leaving in their place a moth-eaten stage garment replete with tinsel and tiny bells which Margaret must needs wear will-nilly, being thus unable to run away.

“ However,” continued Margaret, “ her friend, Joe, came to the rescue. While the show was on, he slipped out, unscrewed the hasps and staple of the box, which were put on from the outside—took out the clothes and screwed the box down again, thus without disturbing the padlock. He had then put the clothes into an empty forage sack and hid it in the waggon.

The rest, of course, was easy. Margaret found her clothes, put them on over the others which she still wore, and at last, by walking and riding, paid for out of the three shillings lent by Mr. Higginson, had arrived in Abraham Street.

“ Well, I never did ! ” said Mrs. Hawkins. “ It's just like a novelette, that it is.”

Later on the question arose as to where Margaret was going to sleep ?

Mrs. Hawkins suggested that Margaret should sleep with her, and Mr. Hawkins with Dick,—if that was agreeable[? But no, Dick absolutely insisted on being uncomfortable for Margaret's sake,—she should have his room, while he,—well, the Poor Man's

Lawyer would have no objection if he slept in one of the arm-chairs for a night once in a way.

Before they parted for the night Margaret asked Dick a question relating to the affair of the Brings. “ What is a ‘ twopenny lean,’ Dick ? ” she inquired.

“ In a lodging-house, do you mean ? ”

“ Yes, Bring’s wife said he had lowered her little hotel by introducing cat’s meat and ‘ the twopenny lean.’ ”

“ Did he ? Well, the lean is a rope,—just a thick rope that is stretched about three feet from the fire, and poor devils pay twopence for the privilege of sitting on a chair and leaning on that all night.”

Margaret shuddered. “ How horrible ! ” she exclaimed. “ What a lot of suffering there is in the world, Dick ! It makes me feel afraid sometimes.”

“ Why, dear, do you think I might some day come to that ? ”

“ No, you will never sink, you will rise. Please don’t say that again, Dick,” she entreated. “ I feel sometimes that the suffering is calling to me, and that I shall have to experience it to the depths some day.”

“ What nonsense ! ” exclaimed Dick. “ You’re tired, my—— What were you ?—*prima donna* at Boggenger’s Great Show ?—Now good night, good night, Margaret.”

“ Good night, Dicky—— Have you still got the little dancing girl ? ”

Dick was going downstairs whistling cheerfully. He paused and said, “ I should just think I have.”

The stars came over the house shining and twinkling,—the eternal watchers that have seen out so many little human lives.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCERNS MEN AND ANGELS

HAD any one told Richard Loverton that an important brief would be given him within two months of his vacation, he might have been sceptical.

Had any one told him that the vision of a young lady whom he had seen for exactly fifteen minutes could have confused his mind when he desired nothing in the world so much as to concentrate it upon his client's case, he would openly have scoffed at such a ridiculous idea. Yet here he was sitting at a writing-table drumming and tapping with his penholder, running his fingers through his hair,—doing anything but what he most desired to do.

He got up and paced the room, then looked out of the window, put his hands in his pockets and whistled,—but all to no purpose.

He tried hard to wrestle with the case ;—time after time he sat down, rose again and paced the room. Then—oh, miracle of miracles, he put on his overcoat, hat, and gloves, and walked—aimlessly—he told himself, to Waterloo Station, where he had a sudden idea that he would like to know how Mrs. Parrott was progressing.—Yes, he would go down and see,—took his ticket, and so obeyed the call of Love.

The country was under snow. He muffled himself in his overcoat and stepped out briskly up the road to the gardener's cottage.

The air cut keenly at his face and brought the blood a-tingling through his veins in a dance of joy. "Heigh-ho!" he cried, half aloud. "What a day for skates." Presently he saw in the distance some dozen boys and girls sliding upon the surface of a shallow pond he had known quite well as a boy.

He left the road to get a closer view of the children as they gaily skimmed over the small stretch of ice, shouting and laughing in their glee. "Happy youngsters," he exclaimed. "Ah! happy goes the day when the heart is young." He tossed a coin on the ice and laughed aloud to see the commotion it caused.

The children crowded round him and asked him to throw more money for them to scramble after. He threw a penny, then another. The boys fell upon them in a heap, though he could not help noticing that a little dark-haired boy whose eyes betrayed his anxiety for the prize, was always just too late to get it. At last Richard called to him. "Look here, my boy," he said, "what is your name?"

"Ralph Green, sir."

"Where do you live, eh?"

"In one of the cottages up by the Vicarage, sir," he said.—"Father's labourer to Farmer Gilliflower."

"You don't seem to be very successful, my lad."

"What at, sir?"

"Why—at catching pennies."

"No, and I did badly want to get one too."

"Well, I'll give you a penny if you'll tell me why you want it so badly?"

"I want to buy a present with it."

"Oh, well,—here's your penny. Who is the present for?"

"Miss Esther up the Vicarage. She's an angel, sir, father said so, and he ought to know 'cos mother said as 'e's generally got the devil in him. Do you know Miss Esther, sir?"

"Yes, just a little. What do you think of buying for her?"

The boy scratched his head.—"I don't hardly know 'cept I thought of buying a brooch when I saved up sixpence."

"H'm! Do you think angels wear brooches?"

"They're shiny things, ain't they? And angels is all over shiny."

"Yes, I suppose you're right. Well, as your object is such a good one, here's two shillings towards it."

The boy's eyes were keener than the man's,—they saw the "angel" come out of the Vicarage and down across the field, as he received the money from Richard. She came nearer. Richard was unaware of her proximity until the boy gave a sudden yell of delight and shouted "Miss Esther!" In an instant all the children left their play and sportively danced around her.

She lifted her eyes and, seeing Richard, stood confused and blushing, for a moment. He raised his hat and went towards her. "How do you do? Can I speak with you for a moment, Miss Garnham?"

She detached herself gently from the children and walked with him.

"I felt I had to come down to see how Mrs. Parrott is going on," he said. "Does she improve?"

Esther looked him full in the face,—both felt unaccountably awkward and yet happy at the meeting.

"Mr. Loverton," she said, "Mrs. Parrott had cancer."

"Poor thing!" He was greatly affected.—"You say 'had.'"

"Yes, poor, poor woman—but the memory of your visit eased her pain. She died with a blessing for you on her lips."

He bared his head.

"She bade me tell you this, should I ever see you again. I did not think I should, but I am so glad you came."

"How is my father?" he asked, after a pause.

"He is ageing," she said. "How I wish I could help you both to be reunited!"

"There is one thing you can do, Miss Garnham,—do not think me presumptuous.—You love my father?"

"Indeed I do—dearly."

"Can you look upon his son as a friend?"

"I do, and have done so, since we met in Parrott's cottage."

"God bless you!" he cried.—"How my father must love you!" He reverently pressed her hand in parting. "Au-revoir, Miss Esther."

"Yes, au revoir, Mr.—Richard."

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Dick Bonnerdale's joy at the return of Margaret knew no bounds. For days he walked on air, smiled beatifically at all and sundry—to hear him tell Mr. Richards the details of her wanderings was a study in enthusiasm;—he changed in manner at once from

a sad, inclined-to-be-morose creature to a light-hearted child of the sun.

Richard Loverton was unable to be much with them at this time, the important law-suit was pending for which he had been briefed. This necessitated a great deal of close application as certain technical points of chemical processes were under discussion, and a barrister is expected to know everything.

Lodgings were found for Margaret near by—in the bosom of the family of Mrs. Hawkins' sister—Mrs. Goodge, an excellent lady, but not strikingly so.

Margaret was quite determined to earn her own living. She had decided that whether Mr. Cuthbertson were her father or not, she could feel no more affection for him than she did for her mother. She resolved to be herself from now, not a dependent, but a self-supporting, free young woman.

Deep within her was the desire to dance her way into fame. The applause she had gained during her stay with Boggenger's Show, had appealed to her vanity, and certainly in that respect she was her mother's daughter.

She shuddered at the prospect of the life just then opening for her. She had obtained work in a tea factory, where she wore a smock and cap, and had to stick on thousands of labels daily by the aid of a machine that worked at a horrible speed.

Jemima Higgs had got her this situation by the honoured process of "speaking for" her to the manager under whom she herself worked.

Dick and Margaret now considered themselves as seriously "walking out" with each other. On the whole it was a very happy time, although differences of desire manifested themselves as time went on.

Dick's tastes were to her a trifle heavy—classical concerts, art galleries, walks in lonely suburban districts, dissertations upon his favourite themes—were endurable for his sake, but not enjoyed by she. He spoke to her seriously of the “Driving Force,” begged her to have a great ideal to live to before her eyes, but she shrugged her shoulders and rambled on with provoking inconsequence.

Occasionally Margaret's own wishes were announced and followed. She liked admiring the contents of shop-windows—a visit to a music-hall, or the “World's Fair”—that stupendous whirligig of noise and movement where Swivel-eye Joe was introduced to Dick and the three shillings returned in spite of Joe's protestations. Both Margaret and Dick perhaps went to extremes at this period in expressing their desires. Dick could be much lighter-minded, and Margaret could be much more serious than they chose to appear,—so that often they met on a common plane. Yet the essential differences in their temperaments became unnecessarily emphasised at this time, and had this effect—Dick ceased to mention country life and a dream he had of going to Australia, to Margaret, whilst she forebore to tell him of her hopes and ambitions for a stage career.

So things might have gone on, and circumstances have moulded their desires to fit in with present necessities, in which case they might have married and been ordinarily unhappy to the end of the chapter, as a chair-maker and wife may be.

But Dame Fortune had decreed otherwise and provided for each the unsettling factor which will duly appear.

Since that evening at Fortune Dene when he had walked impulsively from the house in the dead of night, Cuthbertson had suffered many torments.

He apologised to Fortune very deeply for the way in which he had withheld the knowledge of Margaret's whereabouts from those who were so greatly interested in her fortunes.

At this Augustine the great himself intervened and proposed that he should be entrusted with the task of finding out all about her and her parentage, and that Cuthbertson should be prepared to accept his findings as final, whichever way the verdict fell. This course was adopted, but Guy Cuthbertson chafed at the delay it entailed. He wrote and called to see the older man many times, but Fortune refused to be hurried. "I want to look at the question from every point of view," he explained.

"Yes," answered Cuthbertson impatiently, "but please remember my position. I want to go back to Australia. I am tired of living here in England. Restore my daughter to me and together we will go away—I will make a lady of her. With this uncertainty I can hardly endure life.—Do please let me know one way or the other."

When at last Fortune had his facts complete he suggested to Richard Loverton that he would like to announce the result of his inquiries before a third party,—would he consent to be that third party? and allow a meeting in Abraham Street, so that Margaret would be within reach?

Richard readily consented and asked Dick and Margaret to be within call when the meeting took place.

"But I won't go away for him again," said Margaret. "If I am his daughter, I'm going to stay here, until——"

Dick evinced a very natural desire to know what that word "until" was meant to precede.

"Until—oh, well, Dick, I've never mentioned it to you, and you might be shocked."

"Shocked! oh, you dear, silly girl, were you going to say until—we were married?"

"N—no. I wasn't exactly thinking of that."

"What then?"

"Until I go on the stage."

A silence tense and painful followed her answer. It seemed a long time before Dick recovered his voice.

"Oh! Margaret, do you realise quite what that must mean? You who were born to be loved, will be hated and envied. I've heard say there's no profession more full of jealousy and spite."

"Oh, but nobody will hate me, and I don't hate anybody."

"And you will forget me altogether, and perhaps in the finish you will marry some big fat man with plenty of money."

"Dick!" she stamped her foot angrily. "Have a care what you are saying. I will never forget you and I will always love you, but, Dick, I can't help myself, it's—it's in my blood. I MUST dance, I MUST sing,—perhaps you can't understand, perhaps I can't, but there it is,—I MUST, I feel I must obey it."

The conversation saddened Dick considerably. Richard Loverton tried to cheer him up by saying that most girls so pretty as Margaret are stage-struck

at some time during their lives.—They grew out of it, he said.

Dick derived what comfort he could, out of this mature wisdom ; but went to his work the next day with a sad heart.

Jaggins was gradually lapsing into extreme bullying manners,—when he was not carping about payment or grumbling about the quality of the work, which kept him pretty busy, he allowed himself to utter reflections upon the character of his vicar—Lionel Pontifex.

“ Stuck-up nincompoop,” he growled, when he thought of him. “ Too proud to shake me by the ’and the other night. I think that’s O—T, that’s what it is. I s’pose he knows he’s not worthy to take my ’and.—Passed by and pretended not to notice me.—Cheek ! Impudence ! He’s a prepostor,—he is. Now then young Bonnerdale,” he concluded,—“ get a move on you there. This is a workshop, not a lodging-house for you to fall asleep.”

Dick braced himself for an angry retort, but Jaggins continued to declaim to nobody in particular. “ Honest as the day, I am,” he said proudly. “ Never done a dirty action in my life. Fair, square, and above-board, that’s me. Ask any one about Walker Jaggins, and what would they say ? Why ! they’d say, if they was honest, ‘ He’s a Toff, a TOFF, sooner lose a bit ’imself then do another,’—that’s their opinion of me, yet Pontifex can’t shake ’ands with him. To look at ’im you’d think he was afraid of catching some disease off yer,—stuck-up nincompoop ! ”

Dick called to him from his bench.

"Well?" he growled in reply.

"Just give a look at some of these back legs you've had cut."

"Look at 'em? What for, eh?"

"Well, I can't use them, they've all got big shakes in the middle, they'll fall to pieces with a little wear, and perhaps kill the person sitting on them."

"I can't waste wood," said Jaggins snappishly.

"But you are an honest man."

"Yes, but I've got to be honest to myself,—honesty begins at home—that's a business motto. You just get on with the job and don't preach to me about my business."

Dick pushed the back legs near to the end of his bench, too near—for some of them fell to the ground and broke right across the faulty places.

Jaggins returned to Dick and braced himself for a magnificent display of verbal fireworks. "You—you," he struggled to begin the conflagration—"You, I'll out you!—I'll——" He paused irresolutely, for from below a voice could be heard. "Mr. Jaggins! You're wanted,—Mr.—Jaggins!"

"See to you in a minute," he said darkly to Dick, and left the shop.

Dick took off his apron and put on his coat. He waited for some time but Jaggins did not return. Dick went down the stairs and inquired for him.—"Think he's at home, indoors," said the errand boy.

Dick went to his house and knocked;—the door was opened by Mr. Jaggins. "Well?" he said.

"Is it?" asked Dick. "I thought you were going to do something desperate."

"Don't be a fool, I'll—er—look it over this time,—

other matters to think about. Er—fact is I've had a letter saying Mr. Pontifex is a-leaving our church. Got a call to some fashionable place, I suppose—just like him—stuck-up thing. But there! I couldn't be angry with a worm after such news as that,—so just get back to your work, Dicky, my boy."

CHAPTER XXIV

FORTUNE'S MAN IS SENT FISHING

AUGUSTINE FORTUNE was preparing a sort of agenda—a series of rough notes to aid him in his discourse to Cuthbertson and Richard Loverton—when the door-bell was set ringing and Twysaday brought in a visitor's card on a salver.

"I told you 'Not at home,' " said Fortune reproachfully to his man. "You know what I have to do."

"You did, sir; but the gentleman said he was sure you would see him for a few minutes."

"Reverend Arnold Loverton—oh yes—of course, by all means show him in."

That the Vicar was ageing, as Esther had said, was evident. His walk was more feeble, his white hair more scanty than a year or two back. The contrast between him and Fortune was more marked,—the latter seemed to thrive upon advancing years, was ruddy, and actually growing stout.

"Well," said Fortune, after preliminary greetings were over, "what brings you here to-day? You won't mind my saying that I have very little time to spare, I have an important engagement to keep."

"Don't let me delay you, old friend,—your letter brought me,—you mentioned St. Olave's Church, you remember?"

"Ah yes,—that the present incumbent is leaving."

"Yes. I have come to offer myself as a candidate for the living."

"My dear Arnold," said Fortune, "what an absurd idea! Go back to your Ponderbridge and end your days in peace."

"No," firmly rejoined the other. "There is no peace for me at Ponderbridge. I may not live many more years, but while I have breath I want to do some real good in the world."

"But, my dear old friend," expostulated Fortune, "you are doing good now,—every good, upright man like yourself does good whether preaching or not."

"You are very kind to say so,—but I have set my heart on doing this work; do not hinder me, I pray."

Fortune thought it over for a few minutes. He began to see that this might be the means of bringing father and son together again—both working among the same people, both giving their bodies to the poor,—could anything be better for a purpose he had so near his heart. "Are you so very keen upon it?" he asked.

"Indeed I am."

"Then I cannot very well refuse. I will speak to the Bishop about it. Shall we leave it at that?"

"Thank you much. I won't trespass on your time any longer, you are busy, I know. Thank you,—thank you, old friend."

He went away with a deep content in his heart. The desire for slum service had eaten into the very fibre of his being, and had become almost an obsession.

Alone once more, Fortune considered the story he had to tell that evening,—of how Twysaday had been

pressed into service as an amateur detective, in which capacity he had traced Mrs. Angel to the bar of the "Golden Dragon." He had struck up acquaintance with that lady, to whom he appeared as another admirer in her train, although the "bloom was off the rye" so far as her looks were concerned—she was getting bloated in appearance and commonplace. Vulgarity had stepped from behind the screen of beauty, and smirked, unconscious of beauty's absence.

Twysaday had led up to intimacy during successive visits to the "bar." Then one day he had said to her as though suddenly remembering something unimportant, but of conversational value :

"Oh—I heard somebody speaking about a daughter you lost or something."

"Did you?"—coquettishly.

"Yes, did you ever find her?"

"Who said I had a daughter?"—playfully.

"Why—er—who was it now? Blest if I can remember her name now; said she knew you well and the girl too,—Margaret I think the name was,—if I remember right."

Mrs. Angel did not capitulate at once, but was gradually induced by Twysaday to tell certain things about her earlier days and Margaret, which Fortune wanted to get hold of.

Every fish has its bait, but inexperienced fishermen and amateur detectives often exchange more bait for less fish, which is not as it should be.

Twysaday was over astute; he began to dangle vague hints of advantages likely to accrue to Mrs. Angel if she told him everything about her daughter. Naturally she began to think over his words, and

when finally she sought the co-operation of Miss Poppy Verinder, a combination was formed that managed to get more out of Twysaday than he got from Mrs. Angel.

Miss Verinder, sharp-witted creature, went hunting around Dumpton Court to spy out the land, and to see if any news could be gleaned. "No smoke without fire, my dear," she said.

Thus one day she met Mr. Bring, now a woe-begone, down-at-heel person, who was agreeably surprised and elated when Miss Verinder condescended to shake hands with him and inquire kindly after his health. He responded as gallantly as he could, and babbled on about his own affairs to his heart's content.

Then Miss Poppy remembered old times.—Did he recollect that evening at the theatre?

"Ah!" Bring sighed. "It was 'appy, though it was me downfall."

She spoke lightly of Mrs. Angel, then led on to the subject of Margaret. "Wasn't it funny she should disappear?"—By "funny" she meant strange.

"Yes, you're right."

"I wonder if she'll ever turn up again," she said innocently. "It seemed so funny."

"What!" Mr. Bring's lower jaw dropped with surprise, his face became almost as red again as of yore.—"You mean to say you don't know?"

She contrived to dissemble her eagerness to know. "Can't say I do," she remarked. "Know what?"

"Why, Maggie Angel came back months and months ago! Well, fancy that, and you didn't know."

Like Arowhena of Erewhon, she became silent with a slight emphasis. Then she produced a shilling.

"You won't mind drinking my 'ealth, will you? I can't stop for long, but—er—where is she living?"

Mr. Bring made a show of refusing the coin, but absent-mindedly slipped it into his pocket whilst replying.

"Can't say I know, but she don't work far away, 'cos I see her go past our place every morning. I tell you what—I think that that there lawyer bloke knows something about it,—you know—Richards, of Abraham Street."

Miss Verinder's discoveries made a deep impression upon Mrs. Angel, who at once jumped to the conclusion that she was entitled to some large sum of money, which Mr. Richards was trying to convert to his own use.

Mr. Bring promised Miss Verinder at a later meeting to make a practice of "using" the public-house in Abraham Street, the "Hawk,"—from whence he could see the comings and goings at the house of the "Poor Man's Lawyer." If anything out of the way happened he would come straight to the "Golden Dragon" and let them know.

That was really how far the effect of Twysaday's inquiries had gone, but Fortune, of course, did not know this. He was proud to think he had been so clever in his promptings to Twysaday, which had led to such satisfactory results.

The chief point gained was the date of Margaret's birth. Possessing this he went to Somerset House and obtained an official copy of her birth certificate.

Mr. Bring was glad enough to forsake the domestic hearth for the glitter, such as it was, of the "Hawk."

His sudden partiality for this tavern did not escape the notice of Ginger Stodd, who faithfully communicated the discovery to Mrs. Bring. There are always wheels within wheels. While Bring was looking out on behalf of Mrs. Angel, Ginger Stodd was enjoined by Mrs. Bring to find out her husband's business at the "Hawk." So to that gentleman's intense annoyance Ginger took to dropping in at the public-house also.

Mr. Bring was smoking a clay pipe there one evening and expostulating with Ginger at intervals, when Guy Cuthbertson arrived at the house opposite, closely followed by Augustine Fortune.

"Hullo! he said. "Somethink's up, I can see. Two bloomin' toffs like that don't come down Abraham Street for nothink."

Ginger Stodd was so anxious not to lose any of his remarks that he leaned forward and lost his balance. Bring scornfully watched him pick himself up. "You're a bloomin' fine specimen of the British working-man, you are, Ginger," he commented sarcastically. "You are, 'pon my sivy."

"Don't know," answered Ginger. "I do believe I've hurt one of my Jimmy Jones, me leg hurts me."

"I wish you'd a-trod on your face,—that hurts me," unkindly retorted Bring. "It gives me the fair pip to see you hanging round. If you was useful it'd be somethink; you certainly ain't ornamental."

"Perhaps not, said Stodd. "But I can be useful when I'm wanted; nobody's ever tried me properly yet."

"Ho'!] I shouldn't think they would, neither."

Bring thought Miss Verinder would like to know

of the arrivals at the house of the "Poor Man's Lawyer,"—it would be wise for him to remain at the "Hawk" and look out for possible developments. "'Ere, Ginger," he said, "I'll give you a chance to show what you're made of. Do you know the 'Golden Dragon'—big house near Baker Street? You do?—actually know it,—well, that's good. Go there and ask for Miss Verinder, and say as 'ow they seem to have a little party on at the lawyer's, two toffs are in there with him,—tell her who you come from, old son,—and you're on a cheap drink."

He gave Stodd a few coppers to pay his fare, who girded up his loins and departed on his way.

CHAPTER XXV

A WOMAN'S RIGHTS

MR. FORTUNE invested his announcement that evening with quite a judicial atmosphere, he looked mysterious and secretive as he led up to his subject.

The three men were smoking the pipe of peace before the actual business commenced, with conversational small-talk in between the puffs, when Mr. Fortune rose, and with great deliberation knocked out the ashes from his pipe into the tray on the top of the desk.

"I don't think," he said, "that it is necessary to make many preliminary remarks. We know what we are here for, so I propose to get to business at once."

The others nodded assent, so he commenced—"It isn't every man who has a valet quite like Twysaday. —He's really a very clever man with quite advanced ideas."

He told the story of Twysaday's investigations—how Mrs. Angel had furnished the actual date of Margaret's day of birth, and how he himself had been to Somerset House and brought away a copy of the certificate of her birth. "Now," he said, turning to Cuthbertson, whose impatience was evident by the way he swung his foot,—“I wish to ask you a few questions.”

"I will answer as well as I can," was the reply.

"First of all,—In what year did you marry this woman?"—

"In eighteen hundred and eighty-one."

"Eighty-one," repeated Fortune. "Will you please make a note of that, Richard?"

The barrister set it down in writing.

"As it is now nineteen hundred and one, you married twenty years ago, exactly."

"Yes."

"How long did you stay with your wife? I mean how soon after did you leave her?"

"Something like six months, I should say."

"So you left her nineteen and a half years ago?"

"I suppose so. It doesn't seem so long ago. I was twenty-four when I married, and she was quite a young girl, eighteen or nineteen."

"Just so,"—Fortune held on his way with merciless logic. "If you left your wife nineteen and a half years ago, how old would a child of that union be now?"

Cuthbertson paused, he was beginning to see reasons for doubting the first conclusions. "Nearly nineteen" he was forced to admit.

"Very well, then"—Fortune wagged an admonitory finger,—"I hope you are making notes, Richard.—You are. Very well.—Now, Mr. Cuthbertson, how old would you say this girl Margaret is?"

"Eighteen, or perhaps nearly nineteen."

Cuthbertson knew he did not really think she was as old, but self-justification prompted him to say these words.

"If I can show you her birth certificate." con-

tinued Fortune, "which is an official affidavit under divers pains and penalties, will you accept it as final evidence of paternity?"

"I must—and will."

Fortune handed the slip of yellow paper over to Richard Loverton and asked him to be so good as to read it aloud.

"Margaret Angel—born April, 1884."

Cuthbertson buried his face in his hands, he appeared to be in mental anguish.

"It is now February, 1901, Margaret Angel is not yet seventeen. You agree and admit she cannot possibly be your daughter."

Cuthbertson made no reply. He felt this as the crowning disappointment of a ruined life. He had thought to win a daughter's love—to keep her feet from the defiled paths he thought he saw before her, and now one more hope, the best and brightest of his life, is ruined.

He was extremely sensitive and with it impatient and impressionable. His impulse was to rush out of the room,—anywhere—to brood alone, as he had done that night at Fortune Dene.

"Get back to Australia," said the voice of despair within him. He had risen to his feet and intended to go as quickly as he could to his flat, to brood and ache over his wrong; such a man finds his greatest pleasure in being bitterly introspective.

One more pang was to strike home at him. It was ordained that he should come face to face with the woman he had deserted, the mother of Margaret Angel.

She had received Bring's message at the hands of

Ginger Stodd, who felt himself amply repaid by a generously drawn pint of ale in a pewter pot; and took rapid consultation with Poppy, who with characteristic practicality said, "Can't both go together, my dear, out of the question. You ask the manager for a little time off,—say your aunt is dying,—anything—so long as you go. And don't forget, Jenny, stick up for yourself, whoever you find there, whether it's Marland, or whether it's Jellow,—you're entitled to compensation. So let 'em have it 'hot,'—I would, if I was you."

There was no difficulty in getting away; Mrs. Angel made all possible haste, and was soon at the "Hawk," speaking to Bring, who embroidered the account of what he had seen, with much fancy.

They stood at the "Hawk" window looking out at the house opposite. "How am I to do anything, what can I do?" Mrs. Angel faltered a little. She was of the defensive temperament, not fitted in the very least for aggression.

Bring scratched his head, and tried hard to think of a plan. "I know," he said, "go and knock, say you're Mrs. Angel, and perhaps they'll let you in."

"Yes! a fine chance I should have of getting in!" she retorted. "Things are not done so easy as all that. Can't you think of something sensible?"

The difficulty was solved for them by Mrs. Hawkins, who opened the street door, and made her way up the street, apparently to Toffin's, leaving the door ajar. "Leaving the door on the jar," as they put it, was a popular institution in the vicinity of Abraham Street,—it saved trouble.

"Gorn," encouraged Mr. Bring. "Now's your

chance, pop right in and say you've come for your rights. Gorn."

Mrs. Angel hesitated for one moment—to touch her back hair and arrange her veil, then hurriedly crossed the road and passed through the waiting-room into the presence of the three men who started up in surprise, and demanded to know the meaning of this intrusion. "What do you want here?" asked Richard Loverton sternly.

"I want my rights."

Cuthbertson looked fixedly at her and fell back in his chair.

She raised her veil as she spoke again. "You're not going to do me out of my husband's money," she said. "I want my rights."

Richard recognised the sadly altered face. "Mrs. Angel," he said gently, "what do you demand? why have you come here to-night of all nights?"

She could think of nothing better to say than to repeat, "I want my rights."

Not for a moment did she think that the dark-bearded stranger opposite her was the man she had married twenty years before. "Perhaps" (thought she), "perhaps he is Marland, and the grey-haired man—Jellow."

On the other hand the three men had every reason to suppose that she knew each of them quite well, and the purpose of their meeting. Fortune decided to force matters along. "So you are Mrs. Angel are you?" he said.

She nodded affirmatively. "Well, you've arrived at a most convenient moment, very theatrically managed, I must say.—Still, we want you,—here,

take this chair, I will get another from the next room."

Bewildered by these unexpected remarks, Mrs. Angel allowed herself to be seated, while Fortune got himself another chair and then resumed,—“We’ve been talking about your daughter Margaret. Can you tell us exactly when she was born?”

“I’ll answer none of your questions,” she replied, with some show of spirit, “until I know what your game is. One of you took her away, I suppose.”

Cuthbertson, impatient, reckless, Cuthbertson, sprang to his feet, “I took her away, you are not fit to have a girl with you.”

“Who are you?” she retorted. There was a certain dignity about her that restrained Cuthbertson. “Who are you to have any right to speak like that to me?”

“Who am I?—I wish to God you had never known me or who I was. I took Margaret away, I admit it, because I thought she was my daughter.”

Mrs. Angel looked at him with keen interest. This was a totally unexpected discovery,—for a moment she did not know what to do. That something dramatic should occur was her first thought, but she had no very strong feeling now about this man,—the moment for acting passed—she merely gripped the arm of her chair a little nervously and said with quiet scorn,—“You beauty! So I am unfit to bring up a girl,—yet you—a man that could desert a young wife soon after he married her, considers himself fit to come to her child’s rescue!”

“You are an abandoned woman,” said Cuthbertson.

"I may be—now," she replied, "but I would not have been if you had only protected me, as you vowed you would, before the altar."

"Don't pretend to have been a saint," Cuthbertson replied roughly.—"I know all about you—you said you were innocent when I first took pity on you, but my eyes were opened afterwards."

"Opened?—I don't know what you mean,—opened—to what?"

"Your wickedness, but don't think to deceive me again, I can see into the depths of your heart, your protestations will not convince me again."

She turned to the others with an amused smile,—
"Doesn't he get angry," she said.

"You aggravating woman," he continued.

"Go on, think of every bad thing you can say, and when you have finished, please tell me what your eyes were opened to."

"Do you wish to know?"

"Yes, I do."

"Ah.—You remember a man named Bamfield?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't that make you ashamed?"

"What for,—why should it?"

"He told me you had been—— Shall I go on?"

"Do."

"He said you had been a—— Shall I go on?"

"Certainly."

"Then on your head be it. Bamfield said that before you married me, it was well known you had been a——"

She winced and drew back from the word as though it had been a blow. Then she rose and holding out

her hands appealingly, said, "Listen,—I have not been what is called a good woman. I am not a good woman now, I admit it,—but I've tried to be, and surely God Almighty above will remember that—if you don't."

She loosened the lace about her throat and resumed. "My life has been a story of temptation, ah, you can have no idea what it is. How can you? Listen—I was brought up by my aunt, who made me slave from morning to night in a dark house not very far from here. I was often left in that house to mind the little children while my uncle and aunt went out for the night. I hated it, I ran away,—the different things I tried to get my living at, would surprise you. I was never fitted for hard work,—some are blest that way, I was not, I couldn't stand the strain—I had to run away again, every time the pressure got too much for me.

"I went on like that until I was sixteen, then one day I met a woman,—a nice-spoken, genteel kind of person, who said she had taken an interest in me. She took me to her house, bought fine clothes for me and all that."

"I lived there a month. Then other girls were brought home. Some men came from time to time, and then one day the meaning of the whole thing came to me. I was tempted with unlimited money and fine clothes by the woman, if I would only—I refused. They locked me in my room for twenty-four hours, then sent me up some food, which I ate, and some tea which I threw away, because I thought it might be drugged. I, oh, I can't tell you how I struggled with the woman when she opened my door,

—I managed to lock her in the room, and I escaped, I got away—very nearly starved for some days, then I got a job as a barmaid at the Granite Theatre. It was heaven after what I had gone through.”

“Go on, Mrs. Angel,” said Richard Loverton.

“There is not much more to tell. I met that man there, and as he seemed better than any other man I had ever met, I told him my story. I was only a girl of eighteen then, remember. Mr. ‘Reg,’ as he was known, offered to marry me, I—oh, how I wanted a home!—I said yes.”

During this monologue, Cuthbertson sat with his eyes fixed moodily on the ground,—he now drew out his pipe and sat through the rest of her narrative silently puffing at it.

“He said secrecy was necessary as his people would object. So we lived in furnished lodgings for a time, then—he went away,—we never agreed.”

“Excuse me for interrupting you,” said Fortune, at this point, “but is Margaret Mr. Cuthbertson’s daughter?”

“No! I could find no trace of him, so three years after he went I married a young man I knew, a steady young man who offered me what I wanted—a home.”

“You married bigamously.”

“I suppose it’s bigamy, but I don’t see anything wrong in that.”

“You don’t, eh?” said Fortune, rather grimly. “And Margaret was this man Angel’s daughter?”

“Yes.”

Cuthbertson rose and knocked the ashes from his pipe.—“You hear,” he said to Fortune and Loverton, “she is absolutely immoral. She told me this tale of

her childhood years ago—I believed it then, I absolutely disbelieve it now.”

Mrs. Angel raised her hand to heaven.

“Before God Almighty,” she said, “I was a pure woman when I married that man.”

Cuthbertson made a gesture of impatience,—“Don’t let us fool about here,” he said. “Say how much you want from me, and be done with it.”

She looked at him angrily. Her impulse was to treat his words with scorn and contempt,—but she was not a strong woman. Money was more to her than dignity,—she forgot her anger and the preservation of her good name, “I am not a good woman,” she said, “but you are very largely to blame for that—I want my rights.”

He took his cheque-book from his pocket. “How much?” he brusquely demanded.

“Two hundred pounds.”

Without a word he filled in the cheque, which he gave to the woman, then sat at the barrister’s desk for a few moments writing. “Give this,” he whispered to Richard, as he stuck down the flap of an addressed envelope, “Please give this to Margaret Angel, it’s a little reparation for my mistake.”

He walked out of the room, put on his overcoat and hat, and rapidly left the house.

Mrs. Angel also made preparations to leave. “Where is Margaret now?” she asked.

Richard, who had been greatly moved by the woman’s story, gave her the address.

“Thanks,” she said, “and now I’ll bid you good night.”

She passed out into the street and heedlessly passed

Mr. Bring, who ran after her and asked how the affair went off ?

She felt in her purse for a coin and gave him a shilling.

"Thank you for your trouble," she said sweetly, "I can manage without you now."

Richard turned to Fortune after she had gone and said, "I believe her story to be true."

"Do you ?" was the reply. "She is an awful woman."

"Yes, she is now, but—TOUT COMPRENDRE, C'EST TOUT PARDONNER."

CHAPTER XXVI

CONCERNS A VISITATION OF FORTUNE

THE consequences of that award of Mr. Fortune had the germ of tragedy within them,—for they could mean nothing less than that Margaret was of illegitimate birth.

Richard Loverton was most anxious to spare her the pain of this knowledge, so in handing over to Margaret the letter Cuthbertson had addressed to her, he took the opportunity of veiling the real significance of the matter.

“Margaret,” he said, “I just want to say a word about Mr. Cuthbertson. It appears he has made a mistake about you; it turns out you are not his child.”

“No—but——”

“‘But me no buts,’” he quoted smilingly,—then added in all seriousness, “He admits that he has made mistakes all round, and I am sure, wishes to have the matter forgotten by everybody. You won’t mind letting this matter fade into the dead past, will you?”

“No,” replied Margaret, after a moment’s pause—“I won’t mind. I am glad he has made the mistake, because I’d much rather have my real dead dad to think of as my father.”

“Still,” continued Richard Loverton, “he feels he has a great deal of reparation to make, for taking you

away as he did. So he asked me to give this to you for him."

He handed the letter to Margaret as he spoke, who rapidly slit the envelope through and pulled out a cheque for fifty pounds.

"Oh!" said Margaret, with wonderment and surprise. "That's fine! I wonder what I could do with all that money."

"You might do a lot of things," replied Richard, "but the best thing now is to pay it into a banking account and leave it there until you have quite made up your mind what you wish to do in life,—it might help you to a little business or something of that sort."

"So it might," said Margaret, with eyes sparkling excitedly,—“but I tell you what—I would rather spend it on learning to dance and sing.”

"Of course you might do that," agreed Richard diplomatically; "but I don't advise you to do so,—it is a doubtful investment in many cases,—and unless you have exceptional talent for the light stage, you are likely to regret your step. With exceptional talent and what Dick calls 'the Driving Force' to spin you on to reach the highest and best in that department of life, I should say it was no better and no worse than any other profession."

"I don't quite understand this 'Driving Force,'" confessed Margaret. "But I feel I must dance and sing—it's in my blood, perhaps that is my 'driving force.'"

"Perhaps it is, Margaret, but for Dick's sake be prepared to resist all temptations that may come along. He is a fine lad, I am proud of him; and a

stage career is more difficult than most others. You would not like to break Dick's heart, I know,—he has had a hard struggle with life, and has triumphed splendidly so far."

"Me break Dick's heart!" answered Margaret. "No! Mr. Richards, I love him too dearly for that."

So Margaret had received Cuthbertson's solatium. She did not reflect very deeply over the mysteries of this doubt about her parentage,—it was not in her nature to be reflective.

She took her own path, despite Richard Loverton's words of warning, for like so many others she thought herself born to be a star in the theatrical firmament.

A Mr. Flury who advertised extensively, gathered most of her money into his banking account in return for evening lessons in singing and dancing;—for the rest—she expended it on suitable tokens of her regard for various people—a watch for Dick, a ring for Jemima, brooch for Mrs. Hawkins, and so on as her generous impulses prompted.

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And now two years have passed since Guy Cuthbertson and Mrs. Angel, as we shall continue to call her, squared up accounts with each other—crowded years that have effected a silent readjustment of the position of people and affairs connected with this history.

The Reverend Arnold Loverton is now Vicar of St. Olave's, and is gradually endearing himself to those with whom he has come into close contact. His heart fairly bleeds when he considers the conditions

of the poor around him, and he throws himself into bearing their burdens and lightening their lives with enthusiasm and love.

He is splendidly supported by Esther, who visits the sick and needy in foul alley or noisome court, who treats poor battered derelicts, still women in sex, as sisters—raising them at least for the brief time she can spare with each, to near the level of her own glorious womanhood. They are surely, but slowly,—for poverty breeds suspicion, endearing themselves to the hearts of these poor parishioners of theirs.

Even Mr. Jaggins took kindly to them after a while. He was heard to say of the new vicar, "He's a bit of a fool, but not a bad sort of fool." Arnold Loverton's influence spread even to Bill Bring and Ginger Stodd.

The lodging-house had indeed fallen on evil times. Mr. Bring's business ideas were disastrous in their effects. The opening of some Model Lodging-houses of the "Rowton" type completed the ruin, for the remnant of the "regulars" deserted in a body, so the rooms upstairs had to be let off as tenements, and Mr. Bring had to commence business in the local market-place as a greengrocer in a modest way.

That was how he came to be acquainted with the Vicar, who made a point of visiting the market-place every morning in the week and "passing the time of day" with the stallholders.

The beginning of this custom was fraught with difficulties. The stallholders made very merry at his expense—and played upon him every kind of practical joke they could think of—but he continued to come.

Then he heard that one old lady who sold boot-laces was unable to get out because of chronic rheumatism. He found her dwelling-place and saw the poor old woman who seemed dying for lack of proper nourishment, and from dread of having to go into the workhouse. This was before the days of old-age pensions—for poor people.

He went himself and bought the things she needed, paid her rent for two weeks in arrear, and for two weeks in advance.

The next day when he again walked down the market-place, the stallholders actually smiled to him, and cheerily returned his "Good morning."

Of them all, only Sintell was morose and sullen, as was Will Eston—now growing into a strong young man of dissolute habits.

The Vicar's salutation began to be looked forward to, some of the men in their rough, awkward way, raised the peaks of their caps to him as he passed by, or stopped for a moment or so to ask after the "family."

Richard Loverton heard of his father from Fortune, who had concocted several little plots to bring father and son together, but the best laid schemes may go a-gley, and Fortune's endeavours had so far met with no better fortune.

Richard had less time now to devote to Abraham Street. The important case he had been engaged upon had resulted in a victory for his client, so he was now busy wearing the laurels of success in the shape of briefs, which simply poured in upon him.

However, he saw Esther occasionally and heard a very great deal of her and his father from some of his

poor clientele whom he certainly did not discourage from talking about them.

He also saw Mrs. Angel, who came to him and rather generously forgave him for his failure to get the compensation for her from Marland and Jellow.

She had been to see Margaret, she told him, and had had a reconciliation, although her daughter had declined to live with her again, and had expressed a wish to live apart and visit her mother from time to time.

Richard treated her with much respect, as indeed was his manner towards every woman, and for which she was duly grateful.

She so far unbent to him that she ventured to make a little joke on the subject of her last visit.—“His name was Guy, and he done the guy from me,” she said.

Richard smiled more in sorrow than in anger at this joke, and said half humorously,—“I suppose you don’t want any legal advice just now, Mrs. Angel? What about your will now,—you are a wealthy person, you know.”

“Oh! yes, rather. . . . Perhaps I ought to make my will.”

“But, of course, you have a long life before you. It’s just a matter of form.”

“I’m not so sure I have got a long life before me. I’ve had some rough times, Mr. Lawyer, and the doctor told me the other week that I’ve got a weak heart, and could go off any minute, if I had a great shock. That’s cheerful, isn’t it?”

“Really? But even doctors make mistakes, Mrs. Angel, sometimes. You must come some day when we’re not quite so busy and can fix up your will.”

"Thanks. I might like your advice a little later. I'm thinking of buying the good-will of a little hotel or inn, in the country. I've got a great fancy for the country now."

"Have you? I should have said you were the last person on earth to pine for a country life, but one cannot guess what desires people may have in their hearts."

The door-bell outside announced a visitor.

"Oh! I think I shall like it. It makes a change, you see, from what I've been used to, and Miss Verinder—a young lady you might have heard me speak of, is willing to come with me when it's settled."

"Yes, I see. Well, Mrs. Angel, if I can be of service, don't hesitate to come and see me.—Hallo! here's Mr. Fortune," he added, as that gentleman entered.

"Fortune," repeated Mrs. Angel, "Mr. Fortune,—is that his name?"

"That is my name, madam," he felt somewhat aggrieved. "Do you object to my name, madam?"

"No, no. Fortune! Well, I'm blest.—To think of your name being—oh, it's a nice name, sir,—it only struck me as being singular, that's all. Good night, gentlemen."

Fortune knitted his brow in perplexity. He knew very little of women at any time,—this Mrs. Angel was a perfect enigma to him. "Bah!" he exclaimed at length, "I'm trying to sense the meaning of her words and they are nonsense. Now look here, Richard, I've come about more important things than Angels."

"That sounds portentous."

"I hope it does. Now, Richard, I'm going to presume upon my age and my regard for you and your father."

Richard raised his head at this and paid the closest attention to Fortune as he continued. "I am getting on in years, Richard, and there are two things I have set myself to see accomplished before I die.—One is to establish my theory, and the other is to reconcile a father and son—two very dear people who won't recognise each other's merits because of a little mistake each made some years ago. I want you to help me."

"Please explain what you wish me to do."

"I will,—Richard, do you realise how keenly your father has suffered?"

"I think I do. Esther has told me——"

"'Esther!' Are you so familiar with her?"

A faint colour flushed his face for a moment before Richard replied in a low, distinct voice, "Yes—you see I am in love with her."

Fortune was quite unprepared for this. He leaned back and mopped his brows with a large handkerchief. "Phew!—the world is mad, I'm quite sure it is.—Well, well——"

"I might as well confess everything," said Richard. "I have not proposed to her yet, because—well, perhaps she won't have me for one thing, and secondly, if she will have me, she would not leave my father, I am convinced, especially as we are estranged."

"Richard," said Fortune sternly, "this folly must cease."

"And if she will have me," Richard continued

inexorably, "I shall be the happiest and luckiest man on earth."

Fortune groaned. "That's out of my department," he said. "Don't think me very unsympathetic, but please don't look so moonstruck, there's a kind friend. And don't look so annoyed, my dear boy. You don't quite appreciate my sense of humour."

"I freely forgive you," said Richard nobly.

"Thank you. Now then to business again,—I have quite made up my mind to bring about a reunion. Do you desire it?"

"A point-blank question. I can only give one answer—I desire it with all my heart."

"You do. Good. Now will you take the first step?"

"What in the world do you mean?"

"I mean this,—will you write a letter to your father asking him if he can reconsider the words he used at your last interview, and that you have long ago worn out any active resentment aroused by his attitude. Will you do this?"

"It is a great deal to ask of me," said Richard. "It will cost me something to write as you suggest.—Yes, I will do so."

"Splendid!" Fortune grew enthusiastic. "Splendid! Write it now,—I will be your postman."

Richard, carried away by this new infection, sat at his desk and penned a few lines to his father. His hand trembled ever such a little as it penned the unfamiliar commencement, "Dear Father," but he conquered the natural desire to shrink from doing this thing, and at last folded it into an envelope, and

handed it to Fortune, who unceremoniously took his leave and made his way to the Vicarage.

He was shown into the library as Mr. Loverton and Esther were just finishing dinner. They soon came in together, the Vicar leaning on her shoulder with affectionate security, and greeted Fortune cordially. Both had grown to be very fond of this brusque old friend, and to like visits from him at any time.

"I come at an unearthly hour," the visitor began.

"Yes," said Esther, "it is positively heavenly."

"You are always welcome," said the Vicar.

"I know, I know. Thank you both. Now, Arnold, I want to have a little say with you."

Esther retired to her own room, she had some letters to write, whilst Fortune and the Vicar were occupied in the library.

"Look here, Arnold," began Fortune, "I've made up my mind to make an alteration."

"Dear me," said the Vicar, "I hope you won't do anything very desperate."

"I am not joking, Arnold, I feel this matter very keenly. Do you know that your son has been working among the poor and ignorant for years, within a stone's throw from this building? Do you know?"

"I do," said the other, in a low tone. "Esther has my son's photograph in her room,—I saw it, and she told me he was the 'Poor Man's Lawyer' in these parts. 'But Esther,' I said, 'you know very well who he is,—you saw my son at Parrott's cottage.'"

"H'm," said Fortune, "what did she say in replying?"

"That she knew him well, and that her dearest hope was that we should be reconciled."

“ Good girl ! ” Now, Arnold, what have you^d done in that connection ? ”

“ Nothing—absolutely nothing, I grieve to say. I—it costs so much to sink one’s pride.”

“ Arnold,” Fortune’s voice rang clear. “ Arnold, swamp your devilish pride—write to your boy. . . . Let me be your postman. Write—write at once.”

“ He would not come,” faltered the Vicar. “ He would not come if I wrote to him.”

“ Are you afraid to do what you ought to do ? ” said Fortune. “ Arnold, old friend, do what your heart prompts you to do, and—trust in God.”

Arnold Loverton did not reply immediately. A struggle was taking place within him. Then he shook Fortune warmly by the hand and said, “ I will write, old friend.”

He composed a letter and handed it to Fortune, whose eyes were glistening a little with excitement at the success of his machinations.

Fortune let himself out of the house,—waited a few moments, and then dropped Richard’s letter into the box—knocked upon the door as like a postman as he could, and ran breathlessly away to Abraham Street.

At Richard’s door he stopped, panting. A light burned within—the barrister was waiting anxiously for Fortune’s return. Richard heard a sharp bang on the street door, and the familiar click of the letter-box lid as it closed again. He hastened out—in the box was a letter ; he opened the street door, but the “ postman ” had vanished, for Fortune, content with his evening’s work, had gone quietly home and left father and son to meet alone.

Richard read and reread the letter, just as his

father read and reread the other. Each at once put on his hat and coat, to hasten to the other,—and met half-way.

The old man, heedless of street arabs, of slatternly women in the street, embraced his son and kissed him, and Richard bent his head and said, “Father. . . .”

“My dear, dear son, forgive me.”

We must not tear the veil too coarsely from such exquisite joy and love as this, such things are truly sacred. They said little, but that night two—nay, four hearts were lifted up in praise to One who out of His infinite love had so disposed their ways.

CHAPTER XXVII

A LITTLE SECRET

MOST of us have a primæval desire tucked away somewhere in our composition to have "a little place in the country." To many it remains an ideal, because unattainable. Some realise it and cherish the reality.

The other class fancy it as they sometimes fancy a new diet or some weird compound of drinks,—simply to get a new flavour out of life—a whiff of spice in the rather stodgy pudding most of us have to thrive upon.

To Mrs. Angel the two hundred she had received meant the opportunity to get into the country. To be in the "public line" was essential. So she combined the two ideals and bought the good-will of "The Yeoman's Head" in Essex—a tiny tavern set on a hill situate in the "Switzerland" of that rather flat county. Her very dear friend, Miss Poppy Verinder, out of her love, shook the dust of London off her feet, and took up her abode with Mrs. Angel in the multiple capacity of companion, barmaid, guide, philosopher, and friend.

A pretty little tavern it was, with a tiny stretch of green bearing the sign of the house before it and a goodly garden behind, where fowls and ducks were kept, and flowers and vegetables cultivated by the necessary man—one Joshua Gay.

It was Sunday morning; amid the twittering of

the birds and the cluck of the poultry yard, came the distant sound of church bells.

"Past eleven! Poppy," Mrs. Angel was saying. "I wonder if they caught that train?"

"Expect so, my dear," replied Miss Poppy, with her mouth full of hair-pins, "Maggie's a pretty punctual girl when she comes to see us, and her young man likes to get here as early as he can. I wonder they don't come oftener."

"Well, they ought to be here by now," rejoined Mrs. Angel. "I think you're right, he does seem to like getting here as early as he can, he seems to like the country."

Miss Verinder made a sweeping movement with her hair and carefully stabbed it in places with hair-pins before replying, "I wonder whether he will ever go to Australia, as he says."

"Doubt it. There's Maggie, you see, she's all for lights and shops, and that. She wouldn't like to go. Why even this life down here would get on her nerves something awful."

"And, of course, not to mention the other reason."

"You mean—the stage. Yes, that will keep her in England too. But we mustn't let out to him what we know—eh?"

Miss Verinder carefully adjusted two large ear-rings, then said sharply, "Look here, Jenny,—why should it be kept a secret? It's an honour to get on the stage, not a disgrace. Why should she try to hide the fact that she's having lessons in singing and dancing? I'm sure I never tried to hide it from anybody; I am proud I've been an actress."

"Yes—well—it's like this, Poppy, Maggie has her

own feeling in the matter. She don't want Dick to know until she gets right on the boards, then she can say, 'Now you can be proud of me.' See? And I for one don't blame her for getting up such a nice little surprise."

"H'm, 'tain't every young man has got a young woman who could get on the boards," replied Miss Poppy tartly, "I should think—— Hello! There they are coming over the green, see 'em, Jenny? He do look white, don't he?"

Mrs. Angel greeted Margaret and Dick affably, and took her daughter upstairs to present her to Miss Verinder, leaving Dick to go into the garden and admire the poultry.

Formal greetings over, Miss Poppy opened the ball by remarking, "Your mother and me have been talking your affairs over, and I said then as I say now—I can't see why you should want to keep your ambitions a secret from your young man. If I had a young man who didn't like such a thing, I'd soon send him packing, that I would."

"I thought it would be best to tell him after everything was settled," replied Margaret, then added reproachfully, "You haven't asked me yet how I got on."

"Ah! Have you had any answer?" eagerly inquired her mother.

"Guess," said Margaret tantalisingly.

"He has?" hazarded Miss Verinder incredulously.

"Yes!" Margaret breathed forth the blessed tidings with rapture.—"He said he will put me in next week's bill, and if I 'go down' he'll give me a regular engagement, Isn't it grand! It's lovely!

And to think that Dick doesn't know about it yet."

"Are you going to tell him?" from her mother.

"Expect so,—some time to-day too. I shall say to him something like this,—'Dickie, are you going anywhere specially to-morrow night?' And he'll say, 'No, I think not, why?' Then I'll say, 'Well, will you go to the Theatre of Varieties in Mawk Street, to-morrow night, and keep your eyes well open?'"

"That's a good way of putting it," commented Miss Verinder, "I don't think I could do it much better myself. How much is he paying you?—the Manager I mean."

"Er—well," explained Margaret. "He doesn't know yet how much I am worth, but he thinks he'll be able to give me twenty-five shillings a week."

"My word," said Mrs. Angel. "He'll hurt himself throwing away money in that reckless way—twenty-five pounds a week would be nearer the mark. I've read in the papers that artistes get no end of money."

"Still, Jenny," expostulated Poppy, "we've all got to begin at the bottom—I had to—and work up to the top. You mustn't put too much faith in paper talk—the people who writes have got their livings to get, same as we have, and what they don't happen to know (and it's little they do) they simply guess. I know what artistes get, and I've had what others would like to have, though I say it myself.—No! twenty-five bob is not bad at all—as a start. Maggie's done well out of Mr. Hamilton, that's all I can say."

"To-morrow night, eh?" commented Mrs. Angel. "I should like to see me own daughter on the stage,

that I would,—tell you what, Poppy, old dear, what say—we have a night up in Town to-morrow, and leave Joshua in charge,—so we can go and see Maggie do her turn ? ”

“ Good idea,” agreed Poppy, “ I fancy a little change. We can call at the ‘ Dragon ’ and see how people are, and after seeing Maggie, catch the last train home, eh ? ”

“ That’s it,” Mrs. Angel clapped her hands. “ I should like a little change too, dear.”

Dick in the meantime had been round the garden in company with Mr. Gay, a gentleman whose name was in obvious antithesis to his nature.—“ That cock is a Croad,” he said lugubriously, pointing to a crowing monster of that species of fowl that ruled the roost.

“ Is it ? ” encouraged Dick.

“ Yes,” said Joshua, “ and there’s a lesson to be got from a poultry yard, if only people’ll stop to think.”

“ No doubt,” Dick replied. “ I suppose you’ve reduced the matter to a science—‘ Moral Lessons from our Fowls ’ or something like that.”

Mr. Gay brushed these irreverent remarks aside. “ What I mean is this. That cock fowl there is a beauty, and he don’t stand no nonsense.—He’s master—absolutely. If he wants something and a hen is in his way, bang—boff !—he gets her by the scruff of the neck and . . . the hen is sorry she spoke, as it were. See the moral of it ? ”

“ Can’t say I do exactly.”

Joshua looked round apprehensively.—“ Never be hen-pecked. As soon as a woman starts a-crow-

ing—do what this yere cock does.—See ? Gather my meaning ? ”

Mrs. Angel at this moment raised her voice demanding “ Josh—Josh Gay ! ” then added impatiently, “ Now then, Joshua, move yourself.”

Josh shook his fist in the direction of her voice and stumped away obediently, saying as he went, “ Can learn a lot o’ lessons from a farmyard.”

At the tea-table the secret was broached to Dick. The four of them were at that happy stage before the cake begins to go round—when Mrs. Angel looked inquiringly at Miss Verinder who in turn raised her eyebrows interrogatively to Margaret. Mrs. Angel gave a low ahem ! but nobody else responded. So she said, “ We’re coming up to London to-morrow, Dick.”

“ Oh ! are you. Business I suppose ? ”

“ Partly, shall we see you ? ”

“ I rather doubt it. You see I’m not generally on show on Monday.”

“ But you’ll be seeing Maggie, won’t you ? ”

“ Don’t know. I think not.”

“ Ah ! ” A little pause—then Mrs. Angel tried a new tack. “ Still working for that same man ? ”

“ Who ? Jaggins ? Yes.”

“ How’s he going on ? ”

“ About the same as usual. I know him pretty well by now.”

“ Yes ! I suppose you’ll always work for him.”

“ No ! No ! I am hoping to leave him very shortly.”

“ Go on !—throw up a regular job ? It’s risky, ain’t it ? with so much unemployment.”

"If everybody threw up their regular jobs I expect things would get much better," rejoined Dick.

"Like a game of postman's knock, eh?" ventured Miss Poppy.

"Exactly—but the fact is, I hope to get away to Australia next spring."

"What's Maggie going to do then?" asked Mrs. Angel.

"That's for her to decide," said Dick. "I hope she will—well, we shall see—won't we?"

"I suppose so,—how's that lawyer man going on?"

"All right."—Dick was inclined to be close in speaking of his friend.

"Oh! New parson there—isn't there?"

"Yes, fine chap,—imposed upon by some of them round there. My uncle—you know, the Sintells, has been made caretaker at the church by him."

"Has he really! How did he manage to pop in there?"

"Well, I understand he was a little bit artful—my uncle, I mean. Said 'the market was going wrong, he couldn't make it pay.' So every Sunday morning he pitched his stall right opposite the church."

"Artful devil!" was Miss Poppy's delicate comment.

"Yes, the new vicar is very touchy about Sunday trading, and every time he saw my uncle over there he felt a bit upset. So one Sunday he went over and spoke to him about it."

"What did your uncle say?" asked Mrs. Angel.

"Pitched a tale of woe, said 'his children would starve if he kept to the market,—must live somehow'—and all the rest of it,—so the Vicar pensioned

off the old couple, the Pilkins, who were doing the caretaking and put my uncle and family in their place."

"H'm.—Too good for this world," concluded Miss Poppy.

"Still—Jaggins is well after my uncle," resumed Dick, "and sees that he does his duties satisfactorily. And from what I know of Jaggins, my uncle will have to do his money's worth."

Margaret was silent then and indeed remained so until they had left for home. She was wondering how Dick would take the news she had to tell, whether he would be flushed with excitement and joy as she herself was, or if he would frown and look reproachfully at her.

"Do you think me a bear?" asked Dick, when they were alone in the train.

"A bear!—my goodness no,—why?"

"I feel a little bit gruff to-day, that is all, dear. But if I have not been gruff to you, all is well. You have been quiet,—it's not like you."

"No! the fact is I—well—I want to tell you something."

"Important?"

"Yes! ever so important,—can you guess?"

Dick pretended to think very hard and made some foolish guesses, but Margaret waived them all aside.

"Well, I give it up," he said at length.—"Now please tell me."

"Dick, I want you to go to the Theatre of Varieties in Mawk Street to-morrow night.—Will you?"

"Not a very high-class show," said Dick. "Do you mean you want me to take you there?"

"Not exactly that—I wanted you to go alone."

"Oh—why?"

"Please don't ask questions. Will you go? Do please!"

"But my dear girl, what an extraordinary request. Whatever do you want me to go there for?"

She nestled up to his side appealingly. "I want you to go ever so much. I can't tell you now,—you will know there, why I have asked you. Will you, Dicky?"

A ray of light flashed into his understanding,—he held her at arm's length, and looked at her half fiercely, half critically.

His gaze relaxed. He rested his chin on his hand and looked moodily out of the window.

Margaret pressed his other hand sympathetically. "Are you much hurt about it?" she whispered. "Poor old Dicky."

"Of course I must congratulate you," he answered huskily. "It's good-bye to all my dreams. . . . The sooner I go away the better now."

"Don't be silly," she said. "As though it can make any difference. It won't on my side, Dicky, any way."

He brightened up a little at this, but silence walked between them for the rest of the way, even until they reached the door of Margaret's lodgings.

"Dicky," she then said,—she was very pretty and her voice was very musical and thrilling in intimate conversation, "Dicky, will you come to-morrow?"

He looked at her with troubled eyes and set lips—he knew his dream was shattered. He loved Margaret very dearly,—not perhaps with that deep, quiet

affection that time and troubles lived through together can alone produce, but as reverently, as sincerely as any young man in the flush of his first *affaire du cœur* could love a maid.

“Do please say you will come, Dicky.”

He nodded assent. “All right, Margaret, I suppose I must come and see my—*Prima Donna*.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

MARGARET "COMES OUT"

MR. HAMILTON, the manager of the "Theatre of Varieties," was a creature with a husky voice, who dressed well and always wore those hall-marks of the perfect gentleman—a top-hat, a diamond stud, and a diamond ring, so that people not accustomed to meeting gentlemen could save themselves much speculation by noting these adornments of Mr. Hamilton's person, and placing him accordingly.

To Margaret's abilities as a performer he paid little attention; she was an attractive young person—pretty, and had a good figure; moreover, she was introduced by Mr. Flury, her dancing-master, who was an old friend of Hamilton's.

"Anything goes down," was a maxim of Hamilton's, "so long as it's a woman who can look nice and throw herself about a bit."

With this idea firmly fixed in his mind, "The Theatre of Varieties" under his management had earned a reputation for being free and easy in its moral and social atmosphere.

Margaret, with the ignorance of the beginner, thought it was lovely to get a start anywhere. She did not know that it is as easy or as hard to start well as to start badly.

Dick was there—she saw him sitting in the balcony. It was a tiny hall, with a disproportionate box at

each side of the stage. In one sat her mother and Miss Verinder.

After the small band had played the overture with more vigour than art, the card indicating the number of the "turn" in the programme was withdrawn and number 2 announced,—which the programme said was "Margaret Angel,—Sério-comédienne and Dancer."

Margaret appeared in a plain white dress, her hair brushed simply back and tied with a ribbon of "old-gold" colour, and wearing a girdle of the same colour.

Six hands greeted her effusively, but the effect was not inspiring, for the rest of the audience remained stonily indifferent to her appearance,—the "first turn" after the overture is always expected to be of poor quality.

Perhaps that well-remembered evening at the Church Concert had warned her from singing the doubtful songs so many people seem to like; she stood quite still in the middle of the stage and sang, "Sing me to sleep," then a new song. "Such a pretty song," Dick thought. "Bravo, Maggie, you're doing well." The audience was quiet, the band was playing the accompaniment well.—Then, an unmistakable sound, that caused the blood to tingle to Richard's cheeks, came from a man sitting near him in the balcony.

The vulgar note was taken up by others below. Margaret looked frightened, but continued bravely to sing in spite of the brutal insistent reward of the "Bird."

Dick could contain himself no longer. He leaned

over, and seizing the collar of the man who had so angered him half drew him out of his seat.

A wild struggle followed ; Dick and the other joined in battle to the great delight of many other balconiers.

The house was soon in an uproar. Margaret finished her song and retired to change for dancing, while burly attendants forced their way through the crush and finally evicted Dick and the other man by separate doors.

Dick felt for his collar, which was hanging loosely somewhere at the back of his neck, and generally tidied himself up,—then, like a sensible young man, went home.

Margaret's reappearance in Spanish costume was greeted with some show of relief. She danced a "La Espagnol" to the accompaniment of castanets. This tickled the crowd's good humour, so that they began to chant a demand for a "clog dance," and, nothing loth, Margaret complied. When she had finished the applause, if not exactly overwhelming, was satisfying. Mrs. Angel smiled down at her daughter and then at the people in the pit.—She was satisfied, she could go home to the "Yeoman's Head" conscious that Margaret would prosper in her profession.

Hamilton came into the dressing-room and congratulated Margaret upon her success. "But that song o' yours must be altered," he said. "We want something with some ginger in it, do you compree?—Something with some go in it."

Margaret promised to look out for another song and introduced him to her mother and Miss Poppy, who came in to see her at this moment.

Hamilton beamed and created a favourable im-

pression upon these two who very readily acquiesced when he proposed having a cab later on in the evening, while the second house was going on, and driving up West for a little dinner to celebrate the coming-out of Margaret.

She herself flushed with excitement,—her vision rose-hued of a bright successful future before her, hailed the suggestion as her due.

In the meantime Dick had reached home, where Mrs. Hawkins was so full of concern at his appearance that Dick was obliged to give her some account of the performance. This ordeal over, he had a good wash and clean up—then thought things over.

Clearly the time was ripe for him to go right away. Then and there he decided to tell Margaret of his decision to go to Australia as soon as possible now.

He walked about the streets after this—then turned in the direction of Mawk Street, expecting to meet Margaret after finishing her second turn, and to escort her home.

In a foul court where dirty sights and evil sounds were always abroad, was the stage door, surmounted by a gas-lamp; of this a pane of glass was shattered, and the wind flickered the flame unceasingly.

He waited some time. People came into, and people left, the precincts of the court on many errands, yet Dick waited.

Then suddenly the door yawned open and out came Mrs. Angel and Miss Verinder closely followed by Margaret and Mr. Hamilton. Dick stepped forward, but the party had no eyes to see him they were so engaged in talking and looking forward to the evening's pleasure. Hamilton spoke to him—roughly.

"Out of the way, you fellow!—Don't you see you are in the ladies' way?"

Dick half hoped Margaret would look up to see to whom he spoke such words, but she passed on with downcast eyes, eagerly drinking the measure of flattery that Hamilton poured out without stint.

Dick followed them to the end of the court where a four-wheeler awaited them.

He saw them get inside, heard Hamilton give directions to drive to Frascati's—the vehicle moved away.

And Dick—poor Dick,—stood in the middle of the road until the carriage turned a corner, praying within him for her welfare and proof against temptation——

"Oh, Maggie!" was his last cry that night. "Good-bye! Our roads part here. God keep you, sweetheart, good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXIX

ESTHER'S BARRIER

MR. FORTUNE bore his honours modestly. The father and son he had reconciled insisted upon making much of him, while Esther's gratitude touched him more deeply than he would have cared to admit.

Almost the whole of Richard's spare time was now spent at the Vicarage, he was arranging to transfer the "Poor Man's Lawyer" business to a room in the Church schools, in order to identify it more closely with his father's work.

As was inevitable, Richard's feelings toward Esther had to be revealed. He found her one evening in an unfrequented part of the buildings crying softly to herself.

He hated to intrude upon her grief, but the thought that he might be able to comfort her caused him to go forward. The sound of his footsteps roused her, she dashed the tears from her eyes and rose to greet him with her usual manner.

"Esther," his voice vibrated with an emotion he could not repress, "Esther! You were crying when I came in. Can I help you in any way?"

She did not reply but went to the window and looked out.

"Esther, you do trust me?"

"Perfectly," she answered in even tones,—she had mastered herself, "I was tired."

They both stood looking out of the window, while the setting sun cast long shadows behind each upright thing.

"You are glad, Esther, that Mr. Fortune interposed and brought me here?"

She turned her beautiful eyes, now full of liquid sympathy, towards him, and said softly, "It has given me more happiness than I had ever before known. Oh! Richard, I cannot express my feeling as to that,—I——"

"Why were you crying—dear?"

She started ever such a little at the endearing term. While the colour swept swiftly over her face, she stepped back a pace and held her hand to her brow.

"Oh—I—— Do you think, Richard, I ought to go away now,—I mean leave you and your dear father?"

"Leave my father?" exclaimed Richard, aghast at the idea, "and me—why?"

"I am a usurper, Richard; I have been loved and nurtured ever since I remember, while you—poor Richard, you were an outcast. Now that you are united what right have I to share this dear life any further?"

"You are a true daughter to my father, Esther, a loving, gentle child of his heart.—Would you break that heart now, for the sake of a whim? And Esther, do you think of my heart?"

Again the colour mounted to her cheeks.

"Richard," she faltered, "I do not deserve your kindness. I am a nobody, I do not even know whose daughter I really am."

"What does that matter?" said Richard stoutly.

The girl could control herself no longer,—she burst into tears. And Richard could not help putting his

arm round her shoulders and consoling her. "There ! There !" he said at length, and soothed her by stroking her hair lightly. "Esther, dear," he whispered, "will you become my father's true daughter ? I love you so,—will you be my wife ? "

She clung to him in her weakness as she wept, then with an effort withdrew from him.

"Dear—dear, Richard," she said, "I too love you, but I love you too much to let you marry a nameless girl."

He would have crushed her in his arms and changed that Nay ! into the eternal Yea ! but she stopped him with a gesture, and left the room.

He stood for a while looking moodily at the coming night.—What did it matter, what could it matter, whence she came ? He loved her, she loved him, surely nothing mattered in the world but that.

And Esther at that moment was pouring out her poor troubled heart to the Vicar.

He was sorely perturbed, for he had dared to hope in secret that Richard and Esther would come to love each other. But he had not foreseen this barrier to his dearest hopes.

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Richard learned from his father all the details of Esther's adoption, and applied to Mr. Fortune for corroborative details.

He was told of the older man's wanderings in Haggerston, of the woman by the canal side,—of her strange words, and her final remark before she ran away : "Mr. Fortune,—well, you've been good Fortune to me."

Then the green-covered book was produced by Twysaday, and Richard was shown the entries relating to Esther. Reports of her conduct, of traits in her character, as she developed through childhood and girlhood.

"She has been consistently good 'so far,'" was Fortune's summary. "I think I have made a mistake about her."

At length the conversation turned more toward the general aspect of Fortune's theory.

"One of your subjects is about to emigrate," Richard remarked. "I refer to my friend, Dick Bonnerdale."

"Oh! indeed," said the other, "I don't quite like letting him slip through my fingers in this way. Where does he intend to go?"

"Australia," said Richard.

"Any particular place?"

"Not definitely, I think.—Sydney I believe to be his port of disembarkation."

"H'm." Fortune scratched his nose. "Got it!" he ejaculated, bringing his fist down upon his knee, "I don't want him out of my ken, so I will write to Cuthbertson. I have his address,—and recommend this young man to him, so that I can get news from time to time of how he goes on. I could also give him a letter of introduction to take there with him. What do you think,—eh?"

"Excellent idea both for the theory, and the man. The fact that he is Margaret Angel's sweetheart might be an advantage to him with Cuthbertson."

"So it might!—Well, well, Richard, it's a strange world,—good-bye, dear boy. If I can trace Esther's parentage I will.—Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXX

A QUESTION OF MOTIVE

DICK BONNERDALE booked his passage to Australia by the Orient Line, bought clothes, made two boxes to hold them and his tools, one for use on the voyage, the other to be stowed right away in the hold. Had he made a reckoning of his total capital in this world he would have found it to consist of :—

1. Passage papers to Australia.
2. Ten pounds fifteen shillings in cash.
3. A pair of strong arms with cunning hands.
4. Three suits of clothes, some hats.
5. A clever, reasonable, and shrewd head.
6. Tools.

“Heigh-ho ! for the Southern Cross—and Life,” he shouted within himself. There is no fear of the unknown in him,—his ten fingers—rugged fingers that scorn any manicure, hold in their joints full promise of bread while they can move.

It’s a fine thing when a man can look at his hands and say, “Here is my living ; put me down anywhere on this globe, I have no fear.”

There was Margaret to think of, of course.—Dick wrote to her of his coming departure. The letter affected her deeply. She really cared for Dick, but her profession and the adulation of Mr. Hamilton had left Dick but little room now in her thoughts.

She came at once and said "How sorry she was, how she should miss him."

"Are you really sorry I am going?" asked Dick.

"Of course I am. You won't really go,—will you?"

"I will really go, Margaret, I have even got my passage papers. Here they are, see?"

"Well, it's a shame," she said angrily. "Why are you going? I want you to stay."

Dick raised his eyebrows.

"You really want me to stay? Now, Margaret, is that really true?"

"Of course it's true. We have always been sweet-hearts, haven't we?"

"Do you mean you would marry me if I stayed?" he asked. "And give up the stage?"

"Oh, Dicky," she said, "how can I give up the stage? I'm not going to marry any one for ever so many years. I—Mr. Hamilton says I'm going along beautifully."

"H'm, who is Hamilton?—that cad I saw you with the night you first 'came out'?"

Margaret was mightily indignant.

"Let me tell you," she said, "that Mr. Hamilton is my best friend, and I won't have him slandered, I won't,—won't."

"All right, Margaret, very sorry for what I said," apologised Dick humbly. "Fact is, I feel rather jealous to be going away, and knowing that he is with you."

"Well, Dick, I suppose you will come back some day."

"Look here, Margaret," he interposed bluntly,—
"do you care for me at all?"

"Of course I do."

"Will you marry me, not now, of course, but just before I go away?"—he looked at her wistfully. "It might protect you, Maggie, you know, dear. I would leave you at the church door and go right away to make a fortune for you."

"What a dear, dreamy, silly boy it is," said Margaret. "Don't go away,—let's be as we have always been. Let me go my own way, I can make the fortune; you need not work at all then."

"Do you think I am the sort of man who would loaf round while my wife worked? No! dear, I admire a true man, and I could never bear to despise myself. One thing I want to ask, Maggie. If I should make good, will you come out to me?"

She did not answer, only shuddered slightly.

"Come out to me, to that glorious new land, where every heartache of the past will fall away from us, and we can really start our lives—together. Will you, dear? *Will* you?"

She toyed with the little dancing girl on his watch chain. "Do you remember when I bought you that?" she said. Then she slowly raised her eyes to his and said, "Dicky, I can't promise anything. I wish you weren't going, but I can't say anything more—now." Then she went away.

The days wore on, until the Monday dawned of the week in which he was to leave England.

Mr. Fortune sent him a note asking him to call. Accordingly Dick went to Jermyn Street where he was received with evident disapproval by Twysaday.

"So you're going away?" said Mr. Fortune.

"Yes, on Friday."

"H'm, to anybody in particular?"

"Nobody. I don't know a soul in Australia."

"Yes you do, you have met Mr. Cuthbertson."

"Oh yes,—is he in Australia?"

"Very much so; he is a squatter, if you know what that is, and has a tremendous sheep farm at Darling Downs."

"Is that so, indeed?"

"Yes. I am going to offer you a letter of introduction to him. Will you accept it and go there?"

"Mr. Fortune," said Dick, "once at Tunbridge Wells you thought I came to steal something from you because—— Well—you seemed to know what my father had been."

"I admit it. What then?"

"This, sir,—have you altered your mind about me?"

"Why?"

"Because if you have not, how can you recommend one you think to have the instincts of a thief and forger in his blood,—to a wealthy man abroad?"

Fortune was nonplussed for a moment, then admiration was kindled within him. He held out his hand to Dick and asked him to shake it. He did.

"Bonnerdale," he said, "you're most confoundingly disappointing. To tell you the whole truth I really did think you would turn like your father,—you really ought to have done so by all the rules and regulations."

I am very sorry to have disappointed you," said Dick, a little sarcastically.—"Will you tell me why?"

Fortune explained the theory to him and at the conclusion asked Dick what he thought of it ?

"I think it stops short of completion," said Dick. "You say I must have inherited my father's cleverness, his twistiness, his dare-devilry.—Perhaps I have,—but—forging bank-notes and uttering counterfeit coin have no attraction for me. The motive that led to my father's downfall is absent from me."

"Don't you see," he continued, warming to his subject, "Don't you see it's the motive that makes all the difference. A man may be a clever die-sinker, and if he works within the law (in other words within the Royal Mint), he'll get a nice, regular wage, and possibly a pension to retire on. Yet if he does it outside, works overtime to provide the country with money without official sanction, he is sent to prison, and is shot if he tries to escape. Whatever course he decides to pursue depends upon his motives ; his character and abilities may remain exactly the same."

"The motives of a man form his character," said Fortune sententiously.

"I think that view is a greatly mistaken one," said Dick. "I don't know what led my father to take the path he did.—Perhaps it was poverty. I believe in the 'Driving Force,' and Mr. Richard has taught me that the love of Christ is the finest 'driving force' a man can have if he wants to go straight in this world."

"Yes ?"—asked Fortune interestedly.

"And I want to go straight,—in spite of ten thousand theories like yours. I intend to be as near to being perfect as I can."

"You are very ambitious, my lad," said Fortune, in a kindlier tone.

"I am," said Dick.—"My ambition is to be a man among men—and to be the founder of a family that will become famous for its moral worth."

Fortune beamed with pleasure. "You are knocking my theory to pieces, young fellow," he exclaimed; "but by George! I like your spirit. Does Richard Loverton know about your 'Driving Force'?"

"He first put it into my head," was the reply, "and helped me to understand it was there and to guide it.—He is a thorough gentleman—I wish there were more like him in such places as Abraham Street."

"The Guide, Philosopher, and Friend of the out-cast,—eh?" said Fortune.

"Yes, sir," replied Dick reverently,—"like the master before him."

"I am glad to have had this talk with you," said Fortune sincerely, "I hope you will realise your ambitions."

"Thank you," answered Dick. "If every poor neighbourhood had its Richard Loverton the world would soon be transfigured."

"I am sure of it.—And here is the letter I spoke of, to Mr. Cuthbertson. You will soon get to like him, he is not at all a hard man to get on with. You will accept it—won't you?—with my heartiest wishes for God speed and good luck."

Dick hesitated a moment, then made a wise decision.—"Thank you," he said. "I will be glad of your letter, thank you very much."

Dick went to the Temple from Fortune's place and called to see Richard Loverton, whom he found sitting with furrowed brow studying the complexities of *Jimson v. Jimson* and others.

Richard was glad to see his friend, had indeed asked him to call. To him Dick narrated the gist of his interview with Mr. Fortune.

"He appears to be rather disappointed that I give no promise of becoming a rogue," said Dick. "It seems very strange that such a nice man should be dominated by one idea,—such an idea too."

"It is indeed," said Richard. "But, Dick, I owe too much to Mr. Fortune to speak lightly even of his theory,—I have almost come to regard him as the one being ordained to straighten out the tangles in my life."

They spoke of the parish of St. Olave's. Richard voiced serious misgivings regarding his father's health,—he was doing far too much work for one of his age and constitution. To the enormous amount of good he accomplished, Dick testified from his own knowledge.

"He has a great influence too," agreed Richard, "over some of the men especially. But, he is also imposed upon."

"Very much so," said Dick, "some of them look upon the Vicar as a bank. They pitch up some pathetic yarn or other, and your father is too kind-hearted to refuse a 'temporary' loan."

"I don't feel that I ought to speak to him about that," said Richard. "You see it would seem so self-interested. Not that there is any nonsense about my father,—but it is his money, and I have quite

enough of my own. So I don't feel inclined to speak to him about that. What I feel strongly about is the worry and anxiety he takes on his shoulders when he ought to be resting. You know he always seems tired now."

Dick went back to Abraham Street and spent the remainder of the day in packing. Then he went to bed thoroughly tired.

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Margaret was very unhappy ; torn as she was by conflicting emotions she hardly knew what to do for the best, as the day fixed for Dick's departure came nearer.

Hamilton's manners toward her were becoming of the nature termed "familiar." She felt, though dimly as yet, that at some time in the future he would need checking ; her engagement had been successful for the first week, she had signed on for another Hall in the meantime, and this week was back again at Mawk Street.

She finished her second-house "turn" rather late in the evening (she was turn number eight now), and walked out of the stage door hardly knowing what she intended to do before she went home, save that it would concern Dick.

She walked into Abraham Street, then passed and repassed Dick's abode several times irresolutely.

Then she knocked,—impulse may force one to do strange things in such circumstances, even at eleven o'clock at night.

Mrs. Hawkins came down the stairs.

"Is Dickie in. Can I see him?" asked Margaret.

“Why, bless my soul, it’s you!” said Mrs. Hawkins.—“See him? Why, he’s fast asleep,—has been, for an hour or more,—them boxes is heavy what he packed, I can tell you.”

“I should so like to see him. Would you let me just peep at him, Mrs. Hawkins, I won’t make any noise,—do, please, there’s a dear,—I am so worried about him going away, perhaps I won’t be able to see him again before he goes.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Hawkins doubtfully, “it don’t ’ardly seem correct for a single young woman to look at him at this time o’ night, but I might allow it. I’ll go up first and see if all is right for you to just peep in.”

When Margaret looked into the room Dick was fast asleep, his arm over his head,—on the table near by lay the money turned out of his pockets, his watch and chain with the pendant she knew so well, and the passage papers in a large envelope that he had shown her before.

She stepped into the room and examined the pendant. Her heart was thumping violently,—she almost feared the noise of it would waken him.

Mrs. Hawkins stood at the door shading the candle with her hand.

Margaret hated those passage papers, they were the visible records of his going. “I would like to burn them,” she thought.

Suddenly the room was plunged in darkness.—Mr. Hawkins, who had retired to rest an hour since, had emerged from his bedroom to ask the meaning of these strange happenings.

His wife had turned to him and was explaining in

whispers, when Margaret, yielding to an overpowering temptation, took the papers out of the envelope and stuffed them in her bosom. She cautiously tiptoed out of the room again just in time to see Mr. Hawkins' heels disappear behind a door.

"Thank you so much," said Margaret to Mrs. Hawkins, her eyes gleaming with excitement, "I—I will get off now."

She ran when she left the house. She dared not stop to think of what she had done, knew not whether to laugh or cry, ran,—to achieve the impossible—to escape from herself.

CHAPTER XXXI

MARGARET'S LITTLE PLOT

WHEN the imp of mischief does take a hand in the game he does it pretty thoroughly.

Dick woke up the next morning later than he intended, and bustled about ; shaved and dressed himself rapidly, for he had a tender farewell visit to make,—he was going to see the view from Richmond Terrace, walk through Kingston to Esher, then to Leatherhead by way of Oxshott Heath.

This last week was his very own. He had left Jaggins' employment on the Saturday before, and was now tendering his adieux to people and places.

Mrs. Hawkins had his breakfast waiting for him.

"Didn't like to wake you," she explained naïvely, "because you must be a gentleman for this one week in your life, and lay in bed as long as you like."

She did not tell him of Margaret's visit,—she had an idea it might be disloyal to her sex if she did so. And so it was that Dick went out for the day, man-like leaving Mrs. Hawkins to put away the passage papers he had got out to look at the night before.

She, woman-like, left them just where they were, for she disliked any appearance of interfering with his letters or papers. So Dick went forth blithely, had a memorable day's outing, and did not return until very late that night.

Margaret spent a wretched, uneasy night, and next

day carried the papers about with her. She could not bring herself to burn them, she was afraid of—something,—she knew not what.

Like molten lead they scorched her emotions and weighed her down with anxiety.

Every few moments, whether walking, riding, or resting, she had to feel if she had the papers safely. She even took them with her to the music-hall that night, where bland Mr. Hamilton almost frightened her by the ogling leers and coarse looks of approval he gave her.

At the close of her "first house" turn, he came into the dressing-room and suggested that they two should go up West together after her second appearance, but Margaret would not consent.

He tried to persuade her but she remained obdurate, so pettishly he turned away, biting his lips in baffled anger.

Margaret came out of the stage door feeling very miserable and walked about the streets a little, her mind almost frenzied with the menace of a black cloud that seemed to hang over her.

Had she done right by Dick? Was it honourable to take from him what he so desired?

She could not, would not, keep them any longer, she would take them back and tell him of her temptation to keep him from going away,—by this means.

She went to Abraham Street, but Dick was out, Mrs. Hawkins told her. Margaret could not confess her misdeeds to her, so she left, saying she would call again at eleven o'clock that night, and asked that Dick might be informed of her intention.

So the wretched papers remained with her, like an incubus, distilling misery.

Her second performance took her out of herself for a while, and, paradoxical as it seems, she eclipsed herself that night. Encores were loud and insistent,—it seemed as though the audience would never have had enough.

At last she retired and dressed, her eyes sparkling with the excitement of thunderous applause, her bosom heaving with the physical exertion of dancing.

Hamilton stepped forward as she prepared to leave and again pressed his invitation to “come up West.” She pushed him aside, firmly but gently,—she had another, a much more important engagement.

He seized her hand and drew her towards him. “You will come with me,” he said in a low whisper, “or you’ll be very sorry for it.”

“I’ll be sorry if I do,” retorted Margaret. “Don’t be a fool. Let go my hand.”

Madness, passion, lust surged within Hamilton. He tried to put his arm round her waist and kiss her, but she was strong and supple, while he was the flabby, ill-conditioned slave of his appetites.

She struggled violently,—his hat was knocked off, and his temper seriously ruffled, but finally Margaret flung him off and rushed from the building.

When she really got calm again she found herself minus the hand-bag in which after her performance she had placed the passage papers.

To go back that night was impossible after such a scene. She decided to see Dick and tell him everything at once. She found Dick waiting for her at the door in Abraham Street when she got there.

"Hullo! Maggie," he said. "What brings you here so late?"

"Oh, Dicky!" she said in a strained voice, "I am very much ashamed of myself."

"You!—why?"

"I stole them last night, and—and—I've lost them."

"Whatever do you mean, dear?—stole what? lost what?"

"I came last night,—did Mrs. Hawkins tell you?"

"Came last night! what mystery is this! Now don't give way, I can't bear to see you cry. Can I help you to find this mysterious something you have lost?"

"I don't—know—how—to—tell you," she continued in a weak voice. "I wanted to—to prevent your going away. So I took them out of the envelope."

"What? the passage papers!" he said sternly, though incredulously.

"Yes."

"Well I'm blest,—that was a fine thing to do, wasn't it? Where are they now?—You've lost them?"

"I had a little quarrel with that cad Hamilton—you were right, Dick, he is a cad, a beastly cad—and I dropped my bag in the dressing-room. They were in it."

"Well, why didn't you go back for them?"

"I—oh, Dicky, I was afraid."

"All right, Maggie," said Dick, after a few moments' silence, "come with me, I'll see this Hamilton, and get back my papers."

Late as it was they went together to Mawk Street, only to find the theatre closed.

"Pretty fine kettle of fish," said Dick. "Well, we'll have to wait till to-morrow,—don't you trouble about it, Maggie. I think I can understand your feelings, although I don't appreciate them much at present. I'll go first thing in the morning and let you know. Now don't worry, dear, I'm not really angry, you know."

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When he went to the theatre in the morning he found the stage door open though the place seemed deserted. He went into room after room,—stood for a while on the now desolate stage with its white-washed wall at the back ;—into the dressing-rooms,—poor, draughty holes, he thought them,—but searched in vain for any trace of the bag. He went into the auditorium and there found an elderly woman cleaning the floor in the gangways.

"Good morning," he said to her. "I have come for Miss Angel—the artiste, you know."

"Yes," she replied in a meek, I-have-to-put-up-with-a-lot tone.

"She lost a hand-bag last night in her dressing-room,—have you seen it ?"

"No, sir, I hasn't," she said, "but Mrs. Perkins—'Ere, Maria—jest a minute, gentleman wants to speak to yer."

Mrs. Perkins came from the far end wiping her hands upon her coarse apron. "What is it ?" she asked.

"Lady lorst 'and-bag in the dressing-room, hartiste, 'ave you found it ?"

"'And-bag ? What sort of 'and-bag ?"

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Dick could not describe it, but told them that he was going to Australia on Friday, and it was rather important that some papers in the bag should go with him.

"Well," said Mrs. Perkins, after pondering over the matter for a prodigious length of time, "I 'as found a bag and it 'as got some papers in, but I ain't no scholar, so I didn't think of lookin' very close."

She eventually produced the hand-bag, in which, to Dick's great joy, were the papers intact.

He gave Mrs. Perkins a half-crown which she spat upon for luck. "So you're going to Australy, young man, are you?"

"Yes," he answered gaily. "Day after to-morrow."

"That's very funny," Mrs. Perkins told the other woman. "I heard a mouse nibbling away all night as I lay in bed, and I told meself it was a sign o' some-think goin' to 'appen.—Excuse a poor woman who's not a-getting any younger, sir, but it's like this,—my 'usband 'e went to Australy thirty-two years ago come next Christmas, and he ain't never written a word since,—would you do me a favour, sir?"

"Certainly," said Dick. "Anything I can do, I will."

"Name of Perkins, Bill Perkins, sir, if you should come acrost him. Tell him Maria is still a-waiting for 'im, will you?—and God's blessing on your head."

Dick promised readily,—he had far too much feeling to treat this poor woman's request flippantly. Poor Mrs. Perkins!

Margaret was overjoyed when Dick went to her

with the hand-bag, and expressed her contrition in no uncertain manner.

"And what do you think, Dick?" she said—"Mr. Hamilton's written a letter apologising for losing his head last night,—said he's had a lot of worry lately and it must have overpowered him."

"H'm," said Dick, "I've heard whisky called a number of names, but never 'worry' before."

"Don't be cynical—it isn't good for young men. He also sends me the offer of a longer engagement,—a fortnight every three months for two years at thirty-five shillings a week."

"Don't have anything to do with the offer, dear," he advised her, "he is a bad man, I feel sure."

"Well, my agent—I saw him to-day—advised me to take it,—he said everybody has to begin like that."

Dick said no more about it, but doubted the wisdom of preserving peace with such as Hamilton.

However, Margaret was not disposed to continue the discussion on the matter, so they talked of quite other things for a while.

When Dick was leaving her, she announced her intention of coming to Tilbury to see him off. "You won't mind if I do? even though I stole your papers?"

"Mind?" he said, "I shall mind if you don't."

So at last came Friday. Dick and Margaret went to Tilbury and waited with the other emigrants in a long shed alongside the ship. Every minute new arrivals entered with luggage and smiles and furtive tears, all somehow mixed up.

Then Richard Loverton and Esther appeared.

"Had to come and see you off," said Richard. "How d'you do, Miss Angel? You have met Miss Garnham before. How do you feel, Dick? fit and well for a new life?"

The girls spoke together, while the Richards conversed also with each other aside.

"Very fit," said Dick. "Only I feel anxious about Margaret's future, somehow."

"Don't let that worry you, Dick," said the barrister, "I will write and tell you how she is progressing as far as I can learn. From what I hear, she is going along famously in her profession. I expect she'll be quite a star by the time you return."

Presently the doors of the shed swung open and they walked up the gangways on to the ship.

All too soon the warning for non-passengers to land again resounded through the ship. People swarmed back to the quay-side in front of the shed, and shouted and waved their hands to their departing loved ones.

"Good-bye, Dicky."

"Good-bye, Maggie dear; you won't forget me even if you do become a star?"

"No—never," she answered. "Have you got the dancing girl with you?"

"Ah—rather."

He shook hands cordially with Richard and Esther, then saw them go down the gangways to join the crowd below.

The small brass band on the ship strikes up bravely "The Entry of the Gladiators,"—the ship herself glides slowly from her moorings down the canal into the Thames. Hearts and eyes follow each loved

form as the distance blurs the individual and the mass is melted into the outline of the ship. And so sailed Dick Bonnerdale, with hundreds of other souls, towards new life 'neath the Southern Cross.

CHAPTER XXXII

“ ONE TOUCH OF NATURE ”

ON a beautiful morning in early spring Mrs. Angel went forth expectantly to the fowl-house in her garden. The reason of her going was not to gather eggs that might be eaten, but to see whether a brood of chicks that was due had been hatched out.

The brood-hen looked up and cackled in low tones as the door was opened, and to Mrs. Angel there seemed to be a careworn expression in the look on the bird's face.

The thought sent a tiny thrill into her heart ; then she lifted the wing of the bird and looked at the eggs. They were intact. She raised one to her ear,—the tweet-tweet of the tiny chick within roused some half-forgotten memory within herself. She listened to the sound of the unborn bird picking its way out of its shell, and a host of the stifled emotions that unremembered memory has in store, surged up into her being, and flooded her finer impulses with a taste of the universal spirit of parenthood.

She who had been a mother herself, heard the strivings of the life within the shell, and irresistibly the memory of a more intimate striving for separate existence in her own experience welled up and overflowed, like some half-forgotten oasis in an arid waste of land, which spreads new life to many

things of beauty whose seeds lie unsuspected in the sand. She put back the egg and left the fowl.

When she returned, it was to see the hen pecking at a shell through which the beak of a chick protruded. She watched it with deep interest, as the hen with great anxiety pulled away some of the shell and looked sideways at the effect of this effort towards the chick's liberation.

Then Mrs. Angel saw the damp morsel of poultrydom crawl out of its shell and creep, to fall exhausted, under the body of the mother hen.

For a time Mrs. Angel forgot she was human, forgot that the hen was less than human. Both sections of existence met on a common plane before the mystery and magic of the coming of life.

Verily "one touch of Nature makes the whole world kin." A common-place happening maybe, that millions of people have witnessed and felt, yet it has some bearings on this story, because of its influence over the actions of Mrs. Angel.

She felt more tender, more affectionate that day than she ever remembered feeling before. She was not given to self-analysis, and perhaps would have found it difficult to explain the reasons for her emotions, but she rejoiced in the possession of them, and spoke to Poppy Verinder in a manner that evoked that lady's wonder and astonishment. Poppy was frankly unable to understand the latest phase of Mrs. Angel,—she herself had got through life fairly well so far without any particular exercise for her heart apart from bodily functions.

Not a bad creature by any means, this Miss Poppy. Staunch in her friendships, uncompromising in her

hatreds, she was what her upbringing, her environment, and her inclination had made her.

That night Poppy went to bed alone, for Mrs. Angel was going to sit up late and write some letters. The emotions of the day were to fructify in letters. She was not a brilliant scholar,—such compositions were formidable tasks to her,—so she bit the end of her pen and wrote and re-wrote two epistles, while the clock ticked off hour after hour into the morning of the next day.

She sighed with relief when the task was over, and at last retired to rest, conscious of a good day's work. The two letters were caught up in due time by the postal authorities, who sorted them out and sent them in different directions. One was to Margaret who was appearing at a third-rate show in Manchester, while the other was to Augustine Fortune, care of Mr. Richard Loverton.

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Arnold Loverton began to bend under the strain of the work and the suffering he saw around him. Never a very robust man, it was now apparent to all that the sands of his life were running out. Richard pleaded earnestly with his father to leave this work to a younger man, but his words were waived aside,—“Let me die in harness,” was the reply.

One thing was near his heart; that was, to see Esther's origin revealed satisfactorily, and to see the two beings he loved most dearly on earth united in wedlock.

He still took the keenest interest in Fortune's theory, and was delighted when that gentleman

issued what may be termed an interim report. "I wonder," said Fortune, "if I got the children mixed. Young Bonnerdale seems to win encomiums from everybody. Cuthbertson has written letter after letter in the last twelve months saying how reliable he is, and what is more, how refined in thought and action he finds him. On the other hand, this young fellow Eston appears to be a loose character, has a police-court conviction against him for "drunk and disorderly," and has nobody excepting Mrs. Sintell, your caretaker's wife, to say a good word for him."

"Yes," the Vicar replied; "he is a wild lad, very wild, and—he is to be married in this church next Sunday.—Jemima Higgs,—your other subject, you know."

"Oh—but I say," expostulated Fortune, "that must be stopped, it is preposterous."

"I don't think so," replied the Vicar slowly. "It is the old tale, and the child must have a name."

"Yes, and grow up in the same vicious circle," said Fortune.

"Not necessarily. Thank God, there is such a thing as moral mutation, and that lilies may grow in foul and stagnant ponds."

"All the same, Arnold, old friend,—I think I must have mixed those two boys up somehow, you know. I really don't know what to make of my experiment at this stage,—perhaps something will turn up rather more favourable."

"Let us hope not," rejoined the Vicar fervently.

"There's that girl now,—Margaret Angel,—I wonder what will become of her?"

"Ah, rather nice girl of her kind, isn't she?"

replied Arnold Loverton. "Esther is quite fond of her, and has been following her career, but she seems to have dropped quite out of London engagements recently."

"Touring perhaps."

"Possibly, but I'm afraid—afraid . . ." he shook his head without concluding the sentence.

"I am very anxious about Esther," the Vicar resumed. "Poor girl! I know she has a feeling that her people may prove to be disreputable,—so, until she knows everything, she steadfastly refuses to accept the greatest joy life has to offer her. Can you find out her parents by any means?"

"I don't know where to start, or how," said Fortune; "but if so much as the shadow of a clue appears I will follow it, you may be quite sure—quite sure."

"There is one other thing I have to tell you," continued Mr. Fortune, "and that is about a letter I have received from Mrs. Angel,—the woman you may remember I told you young Cuthbertson married in his youthful folly?"

"Yes! Yes! I remember quite well," replied the Vicar. "Why, has she written to you?—does she want more money from Cuthbertson?"

"No, that is what I can't understand, she doesn't, but writes instead about motherly love, and says that affection for one's offspring can never die,—doesn't put it quite so poetically, but that is what she means,—and finishes by saying she particularly wants me to go down to her little hotel in Essex, as soon as I may find it convenient."

"And you will go?" asked Arnold Loverton.

“Don't know,” was the reply. “It isn't very convenient at any time ; again, why can she desire to see me ? ”

“Perhaps she wishes to say something about Guy Cuthbertson that you ought to know, and about her daughter Margaret. I think you ought to go, old friend.”

“H'm, it's a bore,—but since you desire it I will go some time to-morrow.”

“When did you receive this letter ? ”

“Some days ago. I did not intend to take any notice of it, you see ; but I will now since you wish me to.”

“You know my son has given up the house in Abraham Street,” remarked the Vicar. “He has secured some sort of caretaker's position for the people he had there,—the Hawkins's, you may recollect.”

For the next half-hour Fortune leaned back in a comfortable chair and smoked his favourite pipe. Then he sprang to his feet and said abruptly, “I will certainly go and see Mrs. Angel to-morrow, as you wish it.”

A few words of farewell and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. FORTUNE GOES TO "THE YEOMAN'S HEAD"

IN response to the letter she received from her mother, Margaret went to Essex to spend some weeks' holiday.

She was not in the best of spirits. Her stage career so far was insignificant from a general point of view, although to her mother and Miss Poppy it had seemed to be a triumphal progress.

Mr. Hamilton had come out in his true colours. He had made base proposals to her, and she had scornfully sent him right about face,—and so he had discovered a convenient clause in the contract he had arranged with her, and had withdrawn his engagements from her.

Margaret, still young enough to think that some day the world would be at her feet, went forth gaily from that last bitter interview when she had called Hamilton some hard but true names.

To her agents she then went, who gasped with surprise when she told them that her engagement was cancelled. They admitted the existence of the clause in question but excused their own lack of watchfulness in their client's interest, on the score that such a clause was usual, but not, as a rule, applied.

She asked them to get her "something decent," and what they got for her as answering to this, was

—an insignificant position in a second-rate touring company that flitted every Sunday in search of an audience.

Privation and wretchedness, jealousy and despair were a prominent group in that tour, and Margaret tasted to the full the bitterest dregs of human misery.

The letter from her mother, simple, affectionate, and so unexpected, fell like a hammer upon the chain of circumstances that bound her to this wretched vagrant life; she threw it up there and then, so Mr. Fortune found her at the “Yeoman’s Head” when he arrived.

“Good morning,” he said. “My name is Fortune. I believe Mrs. Angel is expecting me?”

Margaret looked at him with interest—Dick had spoken to her about Fortune. “Good morning. If you will wait a moment or two I will go and send my mother. Please come in.”

She showed him into the parlour at the back of the bar, a low-ceilinged room, furnished as it had been for fifty years or more.

Mr. Fortune looked about him with interest.

The bare boards were waxed to a high finish,—an old spinet with yellow keys stood open near him,—the room was redolent of departed days. A fine bunch of wallflowers exhaled their fragrant beauty from a vase upon the table, while the quaint dog grate in the fireplace greatly took his fancy.

Presently Mrs. Angel came in, evidently flustered,—and shut the door after her so stealthily that Fortune began to feel just a little alarmed, “You wished to see me, Madam,” he began in his best ex cathedra manner.

“Yes—er,—yes. Would you like some refreshment?”

“Not yet, Madam, thank you; but business first and refreshment afterwards. Please tell me why you wished me to come down here to see you?”

“I hardly know what to say to you,—that’s a fact,” she replied hesitatingly. “You see, my lips have been closed about that matter for so many years, it seems a bit difficult to open them now.”

“Oh!” Mr. Fortune did not in the least know of what she was speaking, but evinced a charitable interest. “I see.”

“Yes, I thought you did, somehow. You seemed to look hard at me that night in the lawyer’s office.”

“Ah! that night! Here, I say, Mrs. Angel,—what are you alluding to?”

“Your real name is Fortune, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I have always been under that impression.”

“Do you remember a woman once saying that you were good Fortune to her?”

He leapt from his seat excitedly and asked, “Did you say that to me?”

“I did.”

“You——? But I don’t understand. I thought—you said you had but one child?”

“That I never did.”

“Said this girl Margaret was your daughter, and no relation to Mr. Cuthbertson.”

“Neither is she. But I didn’t tell about the child I had before her, no fear,—not to him, anyhow. What! him to leave me as he did, and me not to punish him for it.—I could not resist such a chance, I couldn’t really.”

Then a note of tenderness crept into her voice as she continued :

"And I thought and thought over it, and when I found out your name was Fortune—well, it came into my mind again and again. But I wouldn't have written to you, only—I—well, I had a great wish come over me to see my daughter, my first-born, my Katey, if she is still alive. I gave her to you.—What have you done with her?—Where is she?—I want to see her, and ask her forgiveness for what I've done."

Mr. Fortune gave a great sigh of relief. He was overjoyed at the revelation of Esther's parentage,—but hardly knew what to do or say to this woman. So he temporised.

"How do you know I am the same Mr. Fortune?" he asked.

"I never forget voices," Mrs. Angel replied. "I've a bad memory for faces, but voices—never! You are the Mr. Fortune I gave my child to, in Haggerston. I've got her birth certificate if you want me to prove it,—Kathleen Greenaway she was registered, and so you will find if you go to Somerset House itself."

"I am not quite sure where she is just now," said Fortune. "I am so surprised by what you tell me,—I must have time to think things over. Does your daughter Margaret know of this?"

"I can't tell her," said Mrs. Angel. "I only want to see my daughter,—to see her once—would be something. Something within is forcing me to ask you for this. I think God has planted a seed inside me—in my heart,—sounds funny from me, don't

it? Yet God alone knows how painful it is, and how I want to see my girl,—Margaret is all right, but there’s no child like the first. My heart fairly yearns to see her,—a seed of love to show me where I have failed through life——”

Fortune heard the woman to the end of her rambling sentences, while he mentally worked out the situation.

What should he do? Clearly the best thing would be to see Arnold Loverton and ask his advice. “My good woman,” he said eventually, “don’t you think it is a trifle extraordinary to ask me to produce your child at a moment’s notice? I may not know even where she is. You know it is twenty years or so ago since you gave her to me.”

“Ah! You admit that.”

“Well, yes! But I must have time to think the matter over.”

“Why? Do you suspect me of evil designs?”

“God knows, Ma’am, what I suspect you of. I am really afraid I don’t fully trust you.”

The woman closed her eyes as if in great agony. She laid her hand on her heart.

“And this,” she said bitterly, “is God’s bitterness to me. This is His punishment. Now I know what Hell is,—to desire something pure, and be kept from it by the stains in my past life. But you won’t be so hard, you won’t trample on a woman who has been trampled on all her life. Surely, surely, I have paid for my sins,—surely it is not too late to give affection to my own.”

“I am very sorry for you, Mrs. Angel, but I must think of the child as well as of you—and others have to be consulted also.”

She begged him to give a promise that she should meet her daughter,—she kneeled to him in supplication. There was something so verging on distraction in her manner, something so agonised, that he had to mumble out a promise “That he would do what he could.”

And there the matter had to rest. Mrs. Angel opened the door for him to pass through, and offered him refreshment, but he declined.

After such a revelation food seemed impossible, unwanted.

So Fortune went back to St. Olave’s and told the Vicar of his discovery.

For long they discussed the pros and cons of the affair. Loverton was all for letting the mother and daughter meet, but was forced to admit the good sense of Fortune’s objections.

“You might be laying up everlasting worry and trouble for Esther and your son, if they marry,” he pointed out, “and this woman learns that Esther is her daughter. Arnold, old friend, don’t think me lacking in sympathy for this poor woman, I think she is suffering acutely,—just now,—but—how do we know it is more than a passing mood? And, you know, a woman that can part with her child, and make no inquiries for twenty years regarding her welfare, is not entitled to consideration, when that child is grown up.”

“I dare say you are right, Austin,” replied the Vicar; “but I don’t like to think of that poor woman eating out her heart.”

“The repentance is so tardy,” added Fortune. “She seems to be a creature of moods; perhaps the

next time I go there she will be insolent. I should not be at all surprised.”

“Would you not? I wish I could see my duty clearly in this matter,—certainly Esther’s welfare must come before all.”

“That is what I think, and—No, Arnold, they must not meet, that is clear.”

“And Richard, what of him? should we tell him?”

“I think we must. I telegraphed to him as I came back. He should be here shortly.”

Esther was sent for. She came into the room and greeted Fortune warmly.

“Now, Esther,” said the Vicar, “Mr. Fortune and I have been talking of you and we sent for you because——”

Esther was watching Fortune closely. Some intuition of his errand seemed to be in her mind.

“Have you found my parents?” she asked eagerly.

Fortune moistened his lips before beginning to say, “You remember Mr. Cuthbertson who came to Tunbridge Wells while you were there?”

“Yes, I do indeed.”

A pause. Really Mr. Fortune was very husky,—he cleared his throat.

“He is your father.”

Esther shaded her eyes with her hands. She bowed her head as the news weighed her down with joy. Then she asked—

“And is my mother alive?”

“Esther,” said the Vicar gently, “it is as well that you should know a little about your mother.—he is alive.”

“And may I see her?”

"Esther, your mother is not . . . not quite . . . We feel that a woman who can neglect her child for more than twenty years, can have no real affection left for that child. . . . So we have decided, in your and Richard's interest, although, believe me, against our inclination, to ask you to please not think again of your mother. Believe me,—it is better so."

"And what of my father?" she asked. "Has he not neglected me for that twenty years also?"

"No, Esther," replied the Vicar. "I can answer for him, he did not know of your existence, and your mother never told him,—do not worry yourself,—they were truly married."

Esther went from the room to be alone with this great news, and shortly after Richard came in.

"Hallo!" he said to Fortune. "I got your wire and came at once. It's rather strange, but I saw Mrs. Angel outside the gate as I came in."

"What!" said Fortune. "Outside the gate—here?"

"Yes. I said 'good evening' to her, but she stared and stared as though she saw a ghost, or else nothing at all."

"She must have followed me here from Essex. Good gracious! I must get her away, before she knows Esther is her daughter."

"Esther her daughter!" cried Richard, acutely surprised. "Why do you say such a thing?"

"Because, my boy, because she herself told me so. She wants to see her daughter,—it seems to be something like a mania with her.—Do you think it desirable that they should meet?"

"No," Richard answered slowly. "From what I

know of Mrs. Angel she is not a woman to be trusted ; she is utterly unreliable.”

“Esther is Guy Cuthbertson’s child,” explained his father ; “and, of course, (although it is rather soon to say it) he must be invited to the wedding.”

Richard did not remain to answer this remark. He knew where Esther was to be found, and speedily made his way thither.

He peeped through the open door, and saw Esther on her knees, heard her praying to God to bring blessings on the head of her unknown mother. He went away for a little while, and then came back again. She was sitting with her back to him, and in her hand she held a photograph framed in silver,—his own portrait.

He crept in and stood behind the chair. He saw her then raise the photograph to her lips, but the kiss was intercepted, for he rightly divined that the man himself was more precious to her than the portrait.

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When Fortune left the Vicarage he found Mrs. Angel outside as Richard had said.

He passed along, and noticed how she followed like a far-off shadow. He turned and faced the woman, who shrank back in surprise.

“Look here, Mrs. Angel,” he said. “Why do you follow me like this ?”

“I want my daughter,” she said, “my little Katey.”

“Well, I haven’t got her in my pocket,” he retorted rather angrily.

“ Is she in that vicarage ? ”

She spoke in such a way that Fortune wondered whether she was quite sane, she seemed to have a monomania pressing upon her.

“ Oh, don't be so foolish, woman,” he said. “ It's too ridiculous for you to follow me about from the country to Town in this way. Perhaps you are going to follow me home now.”

“ No,” she said slowly. “ I don't think I need do that—I'm going to watch that vicarage.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

MRS. ANGEL INTRUDES

MRS. ANGEL steadfastly kept her vigil ; — but one hour, then two, passed away without bringing the indefinable something for which she waited.

Somewhere among the chimney-stacks around, a neighbouring church clock struck seven,—and then played in the sweet tones of a carillon peal “ There’s nae luck about the house.” Mrs. Angel listened intently. Many, many times had she heard them play, but never before had she noticed how exactly they kept pace with the tidal courses of her emotions. Impulse followed impulse in wavering attacks upon her reason,—she clasped and unclasped her hands in the impotence of her mind to fix upon a course of action.

The tune ceased,—and left a sudden blank within her. She stood outside the very door through which Dick Bonnerdale had shouted that night when Margaret had disappeared. Almost unconsciously she touched the door with the tips of her fingers, and to her great surprise found it opened.

She flung it wide, and ran impetuously along the path to the Vicarage door and knocked and knocked vehemently until the door was opened. Heedless of the servant’s astonished looks and words of inquiry she crossed the hall, and burst into the library.

Arnold Loverton was standing before the fire-place

with a book in his hand,—alone. At the sudden intrusion of Mrs. Angel he took a step forward and asked :

“What is the meaning of this ? ”

The maid stood in the doorway, expecting to be told to conduct this strange woman off the premises.

“What does this mean ? ” repeated the Vicar.

Mrs. Angel tried to speak, but Impulse, after driving her into this room, had left her, like the coward he is, tongue-tied and emotionally overwhelmed. She tried to speak, but instead, a torrent of hot, blinding tears poured from her eyes ; she fell on her knees and, covering her face with her hands, wept unrestrainedly.

The Vicar patted her shoulder gently.

“There, there,”—he soothed her as one might a child. “There now, what is it ? ” He turned to the servant. “Thank you, Susan,” he said, “I will see this woman.”

At length she dried her eyes and rose to her feet, a little shamefacedly.

The Vicar had never before seen Mrs. Angel, but now guessed this woman was she, and dreaded the possible object of her intrusion.

“What can I do for you, Mrs. — ? ”

Like a moan came the answer—“I want to see my daughter.” She could not fail to notice his evident fear at this request. He gripped the back of a chair and asked her to be seated,—anything to gain time, to think.

She gathered up courage from his consternation. “You are a minister,” she said, “you must not lie to me.—Tell me, is my daughter in this house ? ”

The lament of Job occurred to him : " For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me."

" Why do you want to see your daughter ? "

" Why ? because it's right for a mother to want such a thing. Is she here ? "

" Why do you think she is here ? "

" Because I followed Mr. Fortune from Essex after I had told him who I was,—he came straight here, and—you won't lie to me, you are a minister, you must tell me the truth. Is she here ? "

He could not bring himself to answer for a moment, then said, " Supposing what you say to be correct, what do you intend to do ? "

" Nothing ! " she cried eagerly. " Nothing ! only to see her, to speak to her, to see my Katey again is all I ask. Do, do end my anxiety, it's God's punishment,—I've got a terrible hunger in my heart.—You won't lie to me—will you ? "

" Mrs. Angel,"—he was sincerely affected,—*" I deeply sympathise with you, but whatever we have done was for the child's own good. Surely you think more of your daughter's welfare than you do of your own desires."*

" I do, I do," she said, " but I must see her, she is my first-born."

" Yet you have never troubled about her all these years."

She bent her head in shame. " No, but I am troubled now. You won't be too hard on me now ? "

" If you see her," he asked, " will you promise not to tell her you are her mother ? "

" Why ? Am I so disgraceful as all that ? "

"I cannot sanction the meeting unless you promise."

She covered her face with her hands,—perhaps she was weeping: he did not look at her, but turned and scanned his books.

Thus they remained for some minutes, then the door opened and Esther and Richard came in, Esther flushed with joy, Richard softly humming Schubert's "Serenade."

They did not notice Mrs. Angel but walked stealthily over the carpet towards the Vicar in the hope of surprising him.

They each touched him by the arm and were astonished to see how startled he was, and how horrified his expression became upon beholding them.

He indicated by a wave of the hand the presence of a visitor.

Mrs. Angel rose from her seat. With amazing inconsistency she was now quite composed and at ease.

"Mrs. Angel!" exclaimed Richard in uneasy tones, "why are you here?"

Mrs. Angel smiled sweetly, and put out her hand saying to Richard, "How do you do? I just called in to see the Vicar about a little matter. Is this young lady your sister? Good evening, miss."

She held out her hand to Esther, who grasped it. Richard and the Vicar looked on with bated breath,—what would this woman do before she left the house?

Mrs. Angel was looking intently at her daughter, her eyes glittering with a strange light, her mouth pursed, they thought, with determination.

"I've heard of you," she said to Esther, "and I am so glad to meet you,—I believe you know my daughter Margaret."

"Margaret Angel? Indeed I do. I am very fond of Margaret. So you are her mother."

"Yes—is *your* mother quite well?"

Esther's face grew sad in expression, she did not reply. The Vicar intervened at this moment.

"Now, Mrs. Angel," he said. "Is there anything else you wished to see me about?"

"No," she replied a little insolently.

"Very well,"—he pressed the bell upon the table, in answer to which the servant appeared.—"Good evening, Mrs. Angel."

Neither father nor son believed she would go away without giving great trouble, but they were to be surprised, for she only said to Esther, "You don't think me unworthy for you to speak to, do you?"

But Esther, poor girl, bewildered and upset by the unhappy question about her mother, could not reply.

"Only one thing I want," continued Mrs. Angel. "Will you give me a kiss?"

Esther was really frightened by now at this strange woman's words and actions; she shrank back into Richard's arms.

"Good evening, Mrs. Angel," again said the Vicar, and Mrs. Angel walked out without another word.

CHAPTER XXXV

BEFORE THE WEDDING

IN the weeks that followed, Esther often regretted that she had not kissed Mrs. Angel. She hardly knew how or why she had drawn back—only that some irresistible fear had held back all the generous impulses and emotions that would have urged her forward to this poor woman's side.

But she had little time now to dwell upon this matter or indeed to think of much else than her trousseau, and the coming meeting between her father and herself. Guy Cuthbertson had been apprised by cable of Esther's close relationship to him, and also of the love affair.

The reply came swiftly back. He would come to England at once to claim his daughter and to give her away. So the wedding was arranged to be celebrated at St. Olave's by the Vicar, assisted by Lionel Pontifex, now in his rightful sphere of influence at Oxford.

The reception was to be held by Guy Cuthbertson at a leading hotel in the West End, and afterwards bride and groom were to honeymoon in the Italian Lake District.

During these later days little was heard of the Theory, but Arnold Loverton was sorely grieved at the wretchedness about him, and spoke to Fortune regarding the condition of the houses on his estate.

"I hear agitators denouncing you from street

corners," the Vicar said—"holding you responsible for the awful state of these miserable habitations. I know you can do little or nothing now, but, Austin, you told me the leases fall in shortly—will you not then make some alteration in these places?"

Fortune smoked on for a little while, then said suddenly, "Arnold, old friend, I want you to leave here when Richard and Esther marry,—they want you with them."

"While the work is here to be done, and I live, here I remain," was the reply.

"Good," said Fortune. "That means you will go and live with your dear children shortly after the wedding."

"How so?" asked the Vicar.

"Because your work here is done."

"You speak in riddles, Austin,—but about these houses, I want you to promise to alter them, to give a little ground for gardens, to give lofty ceilings, good drains——"

"No, Arnold, your work and my responsibility will end together. This place will be swept away, and a new race imported, whose cares and worries will be quite different to the old. You say I speak in riddles, perhaps I do,—any way,—here is the solution. The County Council are dealing with my agents for the purchase of all these alleys and dens—they intend to raze them to the ground, and to erect other atrocities in their places and call them 'Model Dwellings.'"

"But surely these poor people will be glad of such a change as that, and will move into these new places, so that my work will be just as necessary as ever?"

“No, Arnold, I think not,—they will scatter far and wide. I doubt if five per cent will remain.”

The discussion was allowed to rest at this point, but a few days later the Vicar saw full particulars in the newspapers of the Council's housing scheme for the Abraham Street area, and knew in his heart that his own work was coming to a close.

The days wore on and presently Guy Cuthbertson came to the Vicarage beaming with the joys of anticipation, of buried hopes revived,—an upright, slight figure, with tanned face and hair tinged with grey.

He shook hands very heartily with Richard and his father, who asked him the usual questions that politeness demands before leaving him alone in the library.

It was perhaps fitting that father and daughter should meet, where so recently mother and daughter had met.

Esther walked slowly into the room, while Cuthbertson rose from his seat and came to meet her.

They grasped hands without speaking, and looked into each other's eyes for some moments, eager for some spark of love to kindle between them.

He looked down at Esther whilst with his disengaged hand he stroked her hair caressingly; then he gave a great sob that made her tremble with pity and love.

She flung her arms round his neck, and resting her head against his breast, gave voice to that beautiful designation—“Father.”

So they remained for some time, each proud and happy to have found the other.

The remainder of that day was too sacred to be profaned by other thoughts, but some days later Fortune, with the Vicar, ventured to tell Guy Cuthbertson of Mrs. Angel's visit to the Vicarage and of their decision to protect Esther from any knowledge of her mother.

"Thank you," said Cuthbertson. "You acted for the best. She is an extraordinary woman who will cause much trouble if she is allowed to. I suppose she has not been here since then?"

"No," replied the Vicar. "I am rather surprised at it."

"What I am afraid of," said Fortune, "is that she might get to hear of the wedding and do something to prevent it. For that reason I wish it were not to be at this church."

"I think not," was the Vicar's opinion. "The woman's great desire was to see her child, to speak to her,—and that desire has been gratified. What more?"

"What more?" replied Cuthbertson. "What more? Why, everything!"

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In the meantime the object of their fears had returned to "The Yeoman's Head."

For days she sat and brooded in the room in which she had spoken to Fortune, brooded over her position, over her wrongs, over the slights and snubs she felt she had received.

Poppy and Margaret tried hard to rouse her from this melancholy occupation, but she stared them out

of countenance and heard their words in stony silence.

At last Poppy could stand it no longer. So she sent in an ultimatum to the effect that either the attitude of the hostess would change considerably, or she would go back to London.

Mrs. Angel returned to the bar, though whether because of Miss Verinder's threat or a change in her own mercurial temperament is a moot point.

"Whatever has come over you, Jenny?" asked Poppy.

Mrs. Angel's reply was fragmentary, but, after that, bit by bit she laid bare to her friend the whole story of her connection with "Mr. Reg," of her marriage and desertion, of the birth of her first child, and how she had parted with her to Mr. Fortune when it seemed impossible to sustain life with such a burden.

She told everything relating to her bigamous marriage with Paul Angel, of Margaret's illegitimacy, but slurred over the manner in which she had sacrificed innocent people to her own immediate needs, and spoke movingly of her desire to see her daughter—her Katey, and of how she had met her at the Vicarage, when the child whom she had so longed to see had refused her a kiss.

"My life has been a mistake, Poppy," she said, "but I don't think I've been properly treated over this, do you?"

"I don't see where the mistake comes in," Poppy asserted. "You had to live, and things worked out as they did—so how could you help it? Oh! if I was you wouldn't I just long to get a smack back at 'em."

"Would you, dear? I don't see what I can do."

"Ah, you're too feeling, Jennie; they ought to have me to deal with, that's all."

Her eyes glinted like a smouldering fire,—verily Miss Poppy would be a troublesome enemy for any one to have!

And outside the door listened Margaret; true, she only caught a word here and there, but that little was the seed of tragedy.

The news of the approaching marriage reached them almost casually. Margaret had it in a letter she received from Jemima, who mentioned the matter because she was at a loss for something to write about.

Poppy and Mrs. Angel heard her read this letter at the breakfast table and exchanged glances full of import. After the meal, the two went upstairs together to talk over this most disturbing news.

"So your own daughter is going to be married and you are not even invited," said Poppy darkly. "If that was me, I'd go and stop it, I would, or do something they'd remember for the rest of their lives."

So the stronger will goaded on the weaker to thoughts of recklessness, until Mrs. Angel's passions were white hot with anger against all connected with this wedding.

Day by day Poppy deepened this lust for revenge in her friend until the channels of hate were filled and near to overflowing.

They learned the actual date for the ceremony and waited with a kind of nerve-racked implacability the dawn of the fateful day.

At last it came. Margaret was bidden to stay at

home for the day while her mother and Poppy went to the wedding.

Poor Margaret ! How deeply the knowledge of illegitimacy may stain a sensitive soul is here to be observed. For Margaret the roof of heaven itself has fallen down,—the moral columns of the world have tumbled about her ears,—her heart cries out piteously for an unknown God, and her soul gropes like a blind man in some tottering Messina to find one stable thing to hold to. The knowledge has slowly filtered through her perceptions and the meaning of Guy Cuthbertson's mistake has struck home with all its vile force, to which the low-muttered words that passed between her mother and Poppy have given awful corroboration. So Margaret alone with her sorrow, embittered against her mother, refused to obey her request,—the next train sees her follow to London to form one of the crowd of spectators that were to witness the wedding of Esther and Richard, and with the intention of living her own life again—alone ; away from all who had known her,—away from the Lovertons, from Esther against whom she felt an unreasoning and blind resentment,—away even from Dick Bonnerdale's reach.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE UNINVITED GUEST

THE wedding was at last an accomplished fact. Richard and Esther walked down the aisle to the strains of Mendelssohn's time-honoured wedding march.

Specially favoured parishioners occupied the pews on either side of the central aisle, while outside the church itself a seething mass of humanity waited for the happy couple and the guests to appear and drive away in the carriages.

The marriage savoured of romance. Even to these people who knew so little of the bride and bridegroom's lives, came the knowledge that here was a union of true lovers. The noise of the crowd outside had filled the church with an atmosphere of excitement—the atmosphere that braces the nerves and makes the blood tingle,—and sometimes inspires great deeds.

Richard and Esther both felt its influence as they walked towards the door ; it had been arranged that they should leave immediately for the reception. Through the door outside they saw that surging mass of people ; every window was a frame for many heads, and every prominence a “coign of 'vantage.”

Esther's father and Augustine Fortune were the

first to leave in a hansom in order to be at the hotel to receive the guests. A way was cleared for them by the policemen, round whom the crowd pressed good-humouredly.

Mrs. Angel was in this crush and saw Guy Cuthbertson go by smiling and debonnair, chatting gaily with his friend.

The contrast with herself galled her,—she bit her lip angrily, and clenched her hands to keep in check the dangerous resentment that was beginning to overmaster her.

“Poppy,” she said in a whisper to her friend, “if I had my rights, I should ride in that cab.”

“There now !” replied Poppy. “Who might they have been ?”

“The youngest one was Mr. Reg.”

“It’s a crying shame,” said Poppy,—“you the bride’s own mother, and not allowed even to see her married ! I never heard anything like it. Well, they wouldn’t treat me like it, I tell you straight, Jenny. I should let ’em have it—hot too.”

“Sh—be quiet,” whispered Mrs. Angel. “Here they come. Don’t my Katey look nice !”

The bride’s appearance was indeed worthy of the admiration expressed by Mrs. Angel and many others in that crowd. Her dark hair crowned by the orange wreath, the veil thrown back so that her beautiful face, now a little grave from her recent emotional experiences, looked out trustfully at the crowd, as she walked slowly by her husband’s side to the waiting chariot.

The horses pawed the ground restlessly, two fine bays made nervous and excited by the cheering and

the movements of the concourse of people eager to see Esther and Richard seat themselves.

The coachman gathered up his reins and the equipage began to move, while the crowd, pressing from behind, swept those in front irresistibly forward, closing the gap behind the coach like waves behind a ship.

"Jenny," said Poppy, "where's your blood? You stand here like a stuffed dummy while your daughter goes away without a word to her mother.—Oh! if they had *me* to deal with!"

The carriage stopped for a moment only a few yards ahead.

"Go on, Jenny," urged the lashing tongue of Poppy Verinder. "Go and insist on your rights,—*go on*."

Mrs. Angel trembled for a moment,—she was willing to wound, but afraid to strike. "Go on, you silly fool!" and Poppy gave her friend a little push. Then Mrs. Angel felt some evil power enter her that led her blindly forward. She pressed hotly through the crowd with strange words upon her lips. "My daughter!" she cried hysterically. "Away! Let me pass; let me pass. I will, I *must* see my daughter." Margaret, standing near by, heard her mother's voice raised as though of one demented. She too elbowed her way to the kerb and saw her mother grasp the handle of the carriage door and thrust her face, aflame with passion, into the carriage where Esther shrunk back affrighted into Richard's arms. "Speak to me!" shrieked the hysterical woman. "Speak, my little Katey, speak to your mother! Katey!" Suddenly the horses plunged forward, as the noise rose in volume and whipped their nerves to action. Two

policemen appeared out of the excited crowd that now pressed forward in serrated waves, and pulled Mrs. Angel from the footboard.

"'Ere, steady on, missus," said one of the policemen. "You're not invited to Claridge's Hotel, you know. What do you want to go hobnobbing with these people for, eh?"

Mrs. Angel smiled wanly. The exertion of her recent exploit had told upon her heart, so for a few minutes she was unable to reply. "How do you know?" she retorted at length. "I might be the bride's mother for all you know."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the policeman jovially. "You're a comic, you are. Now run along, mother, before you get run over, or run in."

Mrs. Angel moved away, still panting for breath,—with one name fixed in her mind—Claridge's Hotel.

Poppy rejoined her at this moment and loudly expressed her disapproval of Mrs. Angel's tactics.

"Why don't you do something?" she said contemptuously.

"Mind your own business," retorted Mrs. Angel, "give your opinion when it's asked for.—Now don't be offended, Poppy, my heart's had an attack,—I beg your pardon for being so rude, I want to go now to the reception at Claridge's Hotel.—Will you come with me?"

"Jenny," replied Poppy loftily, "for two pins I'd leave you, I would, and let you fight your own battles;—you are very trying, Jenny."

"I know I am," meekly assented her friend.

"Oh, you know it, do you?" continued Poppy, "very well then, don't be so hasty again, that's all.

—I'll tell you what to do now,—let's go to Claridge's Hotel, and you go in, see, and ask to see Mr. Reg, and then tell him you want to be recognised as his wife."

"But I don't," explained Mrs. Angel, "I only want my little Katey to recognise me as her mother."

"Jenny, you are a fool, I've no patience with you when you go on like this."

They said no more until the hotel was reached. "Now's your great chance," urged Poppy.

Mrs. Angel hesitated a little, then walked into the hotel and asked the hall porter to send for Mr. Cuthbertson, as she had important business with him.

The porter looked at her askance, but it so happened that Cuthbertson and Fortune came into the vestibule to receive their guests. "D—— that woman," exploded the latter, "what in the name of mischief is she here for?"

The porter brought her message to them, and Cuthbertson asked Fortune to settle with Mrs. Angel; he could not trust himself to meet her face to face.

She was shown into a room at his request, which Fortune also entered a few moments later.

"What do you mean by coming here?" he asked.

"Don't you think a mother ought to be at her daughter's wedding," she replied, "and kiss her own child?"

"Depends upon the mother . . . the kiss of a true, noble woman is an inspiration, but the kiss of the other sort of woman is degradation."

"I am the other kind, eh?" she paused and bit her lip in anger at his words. "Well, I think a mother is always a mother and should always be

treated as such. All I want," she continued, "is to be recognised by my Katey—I want to kiss her."

"Do you know what that means?" asked Fortune abruptly. "I will tell you,—it is the kiss of Judas. If you kiss your daughter in the way you suggest,—you betray her happiness. Do you wish to sacrifice her life that your whim should be gratified? Now, Mrs. Angel, what do you say?—I would remind you that this young girl is as pure as the driven snow, while you—ask yourself, look into yourself. What are you, pure or soiled? You ask to kiss this dear girl, who might have been dead for all you cared, and bring such lips to hers as yours."

Mrs. Angel knit her brows and looked sullenly at him,—then she said, "I insist upon seeing my daughter alone,—or there'll be a scene you might regret."

Fortune at once left the room and told Cuthbertson of her demands. Richard, appearing at this moment, was made a confidant and helped to form a council of three.

"What have you to suggest?" asked Cuthbertson.

"That Esther goes in to see her," replied Richard. "This poor woman frightened Esther on our way here. As our carriage was driven away from the church, she thrust her head through the door and shrieked out that she wanted her daughter. I fear Esther half suspects she is her mother. It would be better to settle the matter somehow."

"Well," exclaimed Fortune, "she is a dangerous woman, and a scene must be prevented at all costs. I think Richard is right—Esther had better go in and speak to her and have done with it, although this woman will be a source of trouble while she has breath."

Cuthbertson then went over to Esther's side in order to prepare her for the coming interview.—“ You look anxious, dear,” he said.

“ Yes, father, a woman looked into our carriage as we drove here and cried out that she wanted her daughter. She was the woman I saw at the Vicarage one night,—she was very strange in her manner then.—Father, she frightens me,—is she—— Oh, tell me,—is she really my mother ? ”

She covered her face with her hands as though she feared to look at him while he answered.

“ Esther, dear,” he said, “ that woman is here—in this place. She insists upon seeing you, will you go to her ? ”

Esther sat down weakly.

“ How awful ! ” she said. “ Actually here ? Yes, I will go to see her.”

Fortune took Esther into the room where Mrs. Angel was still standing.

“ Mrs. Angel—Mrs. Loverton.” He said with grim humour. “ Madam, you asked to see this lady. I will return in ten minutes' time.”

He closed the door behind him ; a few seconds elapsed before either of them spoke. Then Esther broke the silence, “ How is Margaret, Mrs. Angel ? ”

“ Very nicely, thank you.” The voice was strained, she seemed to have to force her words out.

“ You wish to see me ? ”

“ Yes——” Mrs. Angel could get no farther.

“ Mrs. Angel,” Esther laid her hand on the other's arm, “ you asked me to kiss you that night in the Vicarage : I have been so sorry ever since that I did not do so.”

Mrs. Angel's eyes were suspiciously moist, Esther thought she saw the glisten of tears, so without hesitation she drew the woman towards herself—and kissed her.

"Don't ! Don't !" Mrs. Angel broke down at this unexpected realisation of all her hopes and desires.—
"Don't ! Don't ! Katey, I am not fit to—to place my lips near yours. Oh, my darling—my——"

Esther's face was drawn as though with pain. "Mrs. Angel," she asked gently, "is it true you are my mother ?"

Mrs. Angel turned her head away,—for a time she could not control her voice, then a weak, sob-choked answer came stealing like a moan through the room.

"No."

"You are not my mother ?"

"No."

Esther put her arms around Mrs. Angel and consoled her. "There ! There ! Now tell me—Did you know my mother ?"

"Yes—I knew her. She was my sister. She is dead—I promised to look after you."

Thus at the crucial moment she lied—magnificently, until at last the words would not come from her lips, until in the excess of her anguish she bowed her head and walked blindly to the door.

At this moment the door was flung open, and Mr. Fortune stood upon the threshold like some grim sentinel.

"I knocked," he explained, "but there was no response. Are you satisfied, Mrs. Angel ?"

She did not answer, but went forward past him into the vestibule, and out into the street.

CHAPTER XXXVII

EVENSONG

THIS unexpected reply of Mrs. Angel to Esther's question removed her virtually from her daughter's life.

The Council of three were astounded at the result of the interview and decided to leave the matter where Mrs. Angel herself had left it. They were not inclined to think of Mrs. Angel as a finally satisfied woman—they expected with foreboding that she would be a constant source of anxiety to them all for the remainder of her lifetime.

They were wrong in this respect, for Mrs. Angel's lifetime was tragically short after these happenings.

She was found one morning, some six months after the wedding—dead in her bed, peacefully at rest in the eternal sleep.

The machinery of her heart had ceased to work, her troubled life had slipped away in the grey hours of the morning.

A letter was found in her desk addressed to Esther which was sent on to her, and thus the truth was brought to her daughter by the hand of Mrs. Angel herself, as the untruth had been.

"I have acted as I thought for the best," the letter ran. "My Katey, the least I can do to make up in some way for the neglect I treated you with, is to

stick to the lie I told you that night at the hotel. I am your mother, but you will never know this until I die. God bless you and your husband,—he is a good man, and if ever you have children may God bless them too. I am now all alone, my only friend has turned from me ; I turn to God for consolation, He will not turn me away. Remember, Katey, I would have been a good woman if only I had had the chance,—but it was not my luck, think as kindly as you can of your mother ; God bless you.”

The reference in this letter to Poppy Verinder was indeed true. She had spoken caustically of Mrs. Angel’s soft nature after that scene at the hotel.—Poppy’s idea of crying quits was to break some windows,—to damage something. To go to the hotel as Mrs. Angel had, with the intention of creating a scene and then to come away after denying the truth of her own case, was frankly beyond Poppy’s understanding.

She promptly declared Mrs. Angel to be a fool. True friendship will bear the strain of folly but it is a serious test ; and the bond between these women was not wrought by love but through convenience,—hence, at this point it broke—Poppy went back to London, leaving Mrs. Angel severely alone, sans companion, sans daughter, sans everything.

So this frail bark slipped its moorings and set sail upon the sea of death, may be to sight a better land—to gain a brighter state.

Esther went to great trouble in trying to find Margaret, who had quite disappeared, but was unsuccessful, so their mother was buried without Margaret’s presence or cognisance.

Cuthbertson erected a marble cross over the grave, with just a plain indication of her identity, and at the base those favourite words of Richard's, "TOUT COMPRENDRE, C'EST TOUT PARDONNER."

.

Three years have passed by since the wedding. Richard and Esther are living in Surrey in a charming old house of their very own. With them lives the Vicar, now grown very feeble but intensely happy, to see his children and their child—a fine boy, about him.

Mr. Fortune is staying with them for a while,—he too looks on the younger generation with a kind of paternal pride, and says, "There is this much to be said for my theory so far as it caused me to try an experiment,—it brought these dear young people together."

Mr. Fortune confesses to failure in his experiment in so far as it affects his theory, but he claims a glorious success inasmuch as it has brought so much joy to a few dear friends. "And that man Bonnerdale," he says. "How I admire his fight against environment, and his fine ambitions! 'The Driving Force' is a very real thing. I would to God more young men possessed it."

Cuthbertson is intensely proud of the family and has a house near by. Some time before this he sold his Australian estate, giving Dick Bonnerdale a substantial slice of land as a reward for faithful service.

Richard Loverton had tried by every means in his

power to trace Margaret, but she disappeared so thoroughly that his efforts were of no avail.

He did not write and tell Dick these things, he feared they might induce him to come home before his welfare was securely established.

.

Dick Bonnerdale, a fine, stalwart figure of a man, went down to this Surrey home the day after his return from Australia.

They made him very welcome, but there was a hunger in his eyes,—they saw how eagerly he asked for news of Margaret ; saw how idealised the memory of her had become in those years of separation.

They could not impart their fears to him ; that disappointment awaited him they felt was certain. To hear him babble of his *prima donna* was touching in the extreme. He left them again after a few hours, saying he was going to find Margaret, wherever and whatever she was, “ Perhaps,” he said, “ she is too exalted to think of me now, but I will go to her and take my little dancing girl—and we shall see what happens.”

He went back to the region where Abraham Street had been. The noise of the pick-axe had been heard in the land,—old rookeries of vice and squalor had been swept away—heaps of bricks and earth were piled on a waste of ground where once had been such teeming life. Dumpton Court was razed to the ground, a wide road was being made to run over the site ;—although, Dick noticed with affectionate interest that the old pump still remained—presum-

ably to supply the workmen with water—now standing like a worn-out sentinel on guard over its ancient site.

Now that the slum was all gone, Dick felt a pang of regret as at parting with a well-liked but ugly friend.

He saw some women and children in the distance picking up old laths and broken sashes for firewood, and decided to go over to them.

They were of the very poor, to whom a halfpenny-worth of wood is a treasure—he stood watching them for a time until a ragged little urchin asked him to “remember the grotto,” holding out an oyster shell for a coin. “Say it right through,” commanded Dick, showing a sixpence. The boy grinned with expectation and recited in a sing-song tone—

“Please to remember my grotto,
It’s only once a year ;
Farver’s gone to sea,
My bruvver’s gone to Canada,
My muvver’s gorn to fetch ‘em back
So please remember me.”

Several women looked up at this little scene and noticed with evident satisfaction the gift of the sixpence to the boy, who scampered about in high glee.

One of the women hurriedly dropped her gathered wood and coming over to Dick asked him if he remembered her ?

He shook his head. “No,” he said doubtfully, “I don’t,—if you tell me your name—— ?”

“Well, I’m blest,” replied the woman, “why, I should have known you anywhere,—you look well, you do—well, I’ll tell you—I’m Jemima Higgs that was—

Eston that is ; that was my little boy that you was speaking to just now."

Dick greeted her warmly and learned that this boy was her only child.

Will Eston had become a thorough bad lot, she explained, and had left her shortly after the birth of their child. He turned up from time to time though, like the proverbial bad halfpenny, and lived for a while upon whatever she managed to provide, then disappeared again.

"Poor old Mimey," said Dick sympathetically.

"Oh ! I am happy enough," she replied cheerfully.

"Things ain't so bad but what they might be worse."

Dick ventured to ask after Margaret, but at the mention of her name, Jemima's lips became pursed.

"Can you tell me where I can find her ?" implored Dick.

"Perhaps I can, but I doubt if she's quite your style now," she replied candidly.

"Why ?" asked Dick. "Is she a *prima donna* or something like that ?"

"I don't know what that is,—but this I can say—there's not a better heart in all the world than Maggie's."

"Amen to that," said Dick. "Can you tell me where she is now, where I can see her ?"

Jemima pursed her lips again. "No," she said, "I mustn't tell you."

"Do you think she wishes to forget me ?" he questioned.

"My God, no ! certainly not."

"Then why not take me to her ?"

Jemima did not immediately answer, but after

calling to her child, invited Dick to walk home with them.

She led the way through the streets and across a main road, then turned down a narrow, dirty thoroughfare and stopped before a dismal-looking house.

"I lives here," she announced, "Number seventeen Prospect Lane. Some fine prospects lives down here too,—ought to see the faces of some of 'em."

"Won't you come in?" she added. Dick hesitated.

"I want to find Margaret," he insisted.

Jemima went in with the boy and returned a few moments later and again pressed Dick to enter.

"Will's turned up again," she said, "he's inside; said he'd like to have a good look at you.—Now don't be shy with old friends;—make yourself absolutely at home."

Dick entered and gratified her husband's curiosity to his heart's content.

Still he continued to harp upon his one theme—Margaret.

"Oh,—all right," said Jemima at length, "you'll see Margaret if you're patient; patience is a virtue, you know."

"I'm not so sure that it is always," replied Dick. "You will, I think, understand my feelings when I tell you that for years,—ever since I left England, I have dreamed of this meeting that is to be between Margaret and myself."

"All right," said Jemima, "keep your 'air on, and I'll take you to see her later on this evening."

She prepared tea while her husband asked questions about Australia, and so, between eating and talking,

the time steadily slipped away until Jemima said it was time to go and see Maggie.

"Half-past eight," said Dick, after consulting his watch. "Does she appear anywhere to-night?"

"Every night 'cept Sunday," said Eston, gruffly enough.

"Take no notice of him," broke in Jemima, "he must have his little joke 'e must;—now then, ready?—Come on then."

She wrapped an old black shawl over her head and led the way out into the street.

The neighbourhood was situate about a mile from Abraham Street—to Dick it was a comparatively unknown country.

They threaded the narrow streets together without speaking, and at last emerged into a wider street, opposite a large public-house on a corner site.

"Let's stop here for a minute or two," proposed Jemima, "I'm a little bit tired."

Dick looked about him with a great pity in his heart for the poor pinched faces of the children, the slatternly appearance of the women and the apparent hopelessness of the men.

He could not blame or condemn these people, he could only pray that some vision might come to these poor creatures and reveal themselves to them—to make them revolt against their ugly lives and squalid surroundings.

At the door of the public-house he saw a woman place a harmonium and play the instrument over for a time.

A few people gathered around her,—he could not

see her form as she coaxed something like harmony out of the worn-out instrument.

She began to sing. At the first line of the song, Dick's attention was increased to a painful interest. It was not so much the timbre of the voice, although that startled him, but the song itself.

The singer went on—

“Sing me to sleep, the shadows fall,
Let me forget the world and all—
Tired is my heart, the day is long,
Would it were come to evensong——”

Margaret's old song he remembered,—he could hardly bear to stay and listen to the woman any longer.

“Shall we go?” he asked of Jemima.

The song and the harmonium stopped abruptly. Dick could see that the woman had fallen forward with her arms outstretched across the instrument.

He rushed across the road at once, but Jemima was there before him. “Get a little brandy, Dick,” she said, “she's fainted.”

Jemima hovered over the woman like a bird over its young and very soon a quiver of recovering consciousness rewarded her attentions.

“Do you know her?” asked Dick.

She shot a strange look at him in reply,—he might have guessed what it meant, but he did not comprehend.

He was puzzling over its meaning when the woman raised her head, her eyes were ringed with shadows, her cheeks were sunken through privation.

“Now then, Dick,” Jemima said sharply, “jest

you get hold of the harmonium and bring it home to my place ; I'm a-going to help Maggie along."

Something shot through his heart at these words, but whether of pain or joy he could not say—he gently pushed Jemima away and supporting Margaret by the waist, led her from the scene.

And here, as they emerge from the gate of suffering, and stand upon the threshold of hope and joy, we leave them, conscious that in the great Southern Continent, Life has still of its very best in store for them.

THE END

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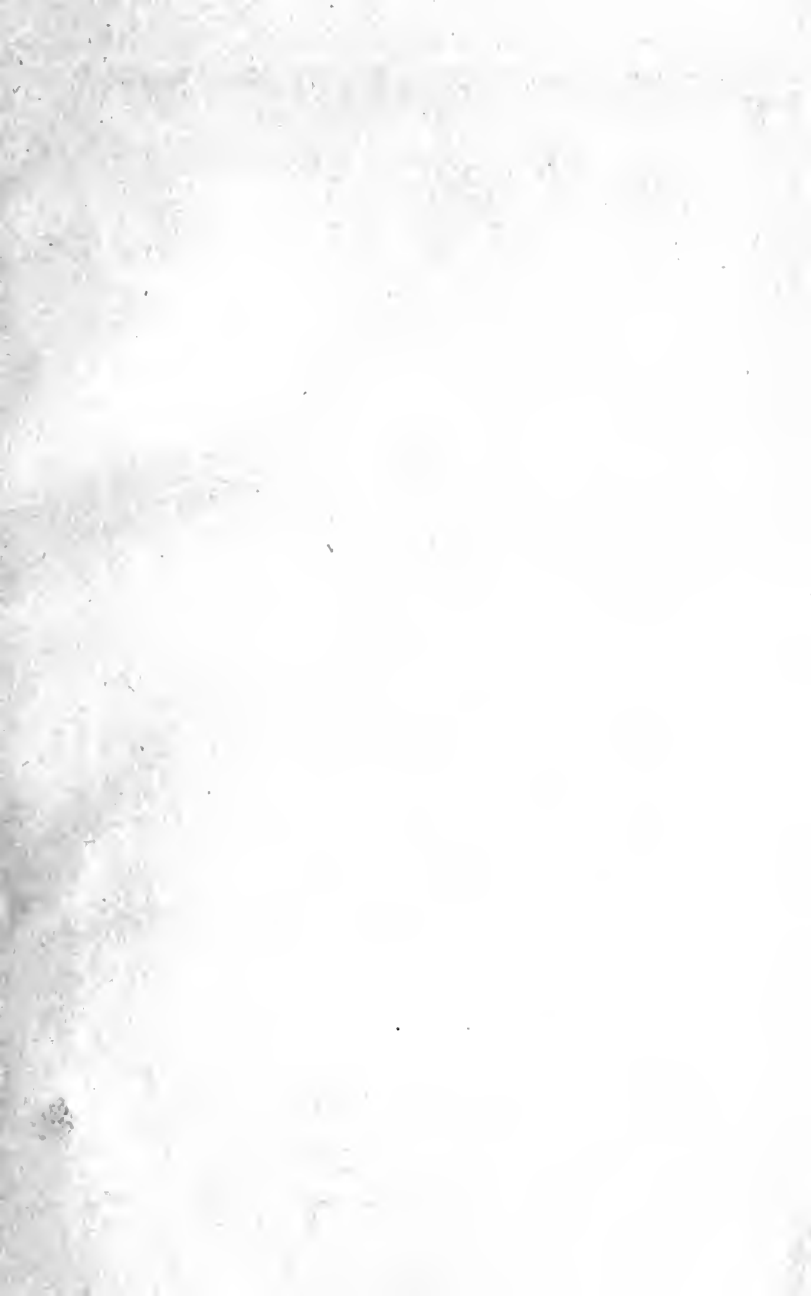
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